



Enthymema XXIII 2019

To Be *and* Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity.
Lacan's Errors and His Disappointing
Interpretation of Shakespeare

Giovanni Bottioli

Università degli Studi di Bergamo

Abstract – Hamlet's desire must be examined in relation to the desire to be, that is the desire for identity: this is the claim upheld in this study. Consequently, the article begins by making a distinction between the desire to be and the desire to have: this distinction was expressed in a new way by Freud, but was never adequately developed either by Freud himself or by Lacan. Therefore, the desire to be has remained prisoner of the Oedipus complex, even in Lacan's reformulation in which it basically proves to be the desire to be the Phallus.

Yet the desire to be must be understood starting from the "modal revolution" introduced by Heidegger, and this allows us to appreciate the more innovative thesis in Freud's essay, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" (1921). Identity is a relationship that may be considered to be a coincidence or a non-coincidence with oneself: in the latter case, we will refer to an "overcoming identity." As a result, philosophy, the theory of the subject and the theory of literature are called upon to investigate *the modes of identity*.

From the perspective of the modes of being, Hamlet is analyzed here starting from his refusal to subordinate his own identity to the role of avenger. His desire oversteps the borders of neurosis and melancholy, in which it had traditionally been imprisoned (also by Lacan). Hamlet is a hero of non-coincidence: he goes beyond the models that appear to him to be inadequate and attempts to construct a flexible identity. Adopting the mask of madness, he has the opportunity to display his linguistic creativity. This does not deny that Hamlet is a tormented hero: the shadow of his father and the lust of his mother are obstacles to the desire for identity.

This interpretation is only delineated in the last pages of the article. It is first necessary to show that the limitations of Lacan's interpretation derive from a narrow conception of the Symbolic and the desire to be for which Lacan never acknowledges creative possibilities. The Lacanian notion of "lack" is a logical and epistemological obstacle that prevents the development of the logic of flexibility and the *non* of "non-coincidence."

Keywords – Hamlet; Lacan; Desire; Identity; Modal Revolution.

Bottioli, Giovanni. "To Be *and* Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity. Lacan's Errors and His Disappointing Interpretation of Shakespeare". *Enthymema*, n. XXIII, 2019, pp. 250-85.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.13130/2037-2426/11512>

<https://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/enthymema>



Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Unported License
ISSN 2037-2426

To Be *and* Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity. Lacan's Errors and His Disappointing Interpretation of Shakespeare

Giovanni Bottioli

Università degli Studi di Bergamo

1. The Need for a Parricide—There Is No “*Adaequatio*” for Desire

What is Hamlet's desire? What enigma is hidden within the most enigmatic of Shakespeare's characters? *Hamlet* is undeniably one of the hardest testing grounds for any theory of desire and identity and we will shortly see how these two notions are more closely linked than philosophy and psychoanalysis have so far imagined. Firstly, we should specify the aims of this article, which will not be able to examine the main interpretations of Shakespeare's work, even though they will be taken into account: my intention is to re-read the pages Lacan dedicated to *Hamlet* in the *Seminar VI*, to discuss not only his reading of this work, but the validity of what he says regarding *desire* and *interpretation*. These are the problems mentioned in the title of the Seminar, held between 1958 and 1959: a title that hinges on the word *and*, the coherency of which needs to be grasped. Undoubtedly, facts exist that are uninterpretable, states of things for which the concept of truth as *adaequatio* appears entirely valid: yet referring to these insurmountable points of resistance when making a denial, which is as easy as it is silly, of Nietzsche's famous remark “there are no facts, only interpretations,” implies that “the snow is white” and “the cat is on the carpet” are excellent examples of what we should understand by *facts*, and that *interpretation* is a term that means injections of sense, to whose subjectivity and arbitrariness it would be difficult to set limits.¹ Nonetheless, even after placing an eventual restriction on Nietzsche's thesis, nothing could induce us to extend the *adaequatio intellectus et rei* to the dimension of desire: a desire—not a need!—exists only in interpretation, that is in the conflict of interpretations. Interpretation demands a *conflictual reading*.

But why abandon Nietzsche's thesis without having understood it, or better interpreted it? Why not postulate that *interpretation* means “style of thought”? *Thought is always modalized by a style*: is this not perhaps the assumption at the basis of a theory of interpretation that leaves behind it all hermeneutics of the meaning? We can speak about facts, and deliberate over their existence, only within a separative style; but we will not be able to conduct an investigation into desire with the separative procedures.

This, then, is our starting point from which we will also assess Lacan's legacy. We will inevitably be forced to acknowledge that the plurality of styles, in other words the plurality of logics, is unable to find a way to manifest itself adequately in Lacan's conception. Like the other great authors (Nietzsche, Heidegger and Freud) of what I have called the *modal revolution*,² Lacan, for different reasons, remains in midstream. And yet his contribution to this turning point was, without doubt, extraordinary: it is thanks to Lacan's register theory that we have

¹ The *bêtise* of realism is concentrated in these assumptions.

² I cannot help but refer to Bottioli, *La ragione flessibile. Modi d'essere e stili di pensiero*.

To Be *and* Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

been able to develop the relational concept of identity and drive it towards the ways of being. What then is there in his elaboration that is incomplete and what is *passé* and wrong?

I am going to start a strict investigation and question some of Lacan's fundamental theses: therefore, my claims constitute a gesture which, in the light of the undeniable debts I have towards him, I cannot help but consider a parricide.³ It is a "Hamletic" gesture, to the extent that it has been deferred and procrastinated for many years. The inspiration behind my reading of Lacanian psychoanalysis is a consensus intertwined with the fact that I distanced myself from it, right from my first re-interpretation of "The Purloined Letter," the tale by Poe that Lacan understood as a device hinged upon the styles of thought, and to which he dedicated some striking lines, before losing the perception of a path that had only barely been glimpsed.⁴ A missed opportunity, we may say, as it could have induced Lacan to rid himself of the equivalence between the Symbolic and the Law, to no longer conceive of the Symbolic as a place of codes, but to think of it instead as the space of intellectual complexity: the only dimension in which the fecundity of the conflict between styles may express itself in all its abundance. The consequences of reducing the Symbolic to a prevalently rigid sphere should be obvious: flexibility, which finds its greatest and most creative possibilities in the Symbolic, cannot be thought of in the Imaginary or in the Real, unless it tends towards the pathological. But what makes this error so grave? Is it not perhaps plausible to claim that human intelligence is overwhelmingly characterized by rigidity? And does excellence not exist perhaps in rigidity? The so-called hard sciences, are they not knowledge oriented towards the rigid? Hasn't the logic boasted by the human mind nearly always tried to find guarantees of its validity in principles and inferences that see a danger in flexibility? How many centuries did it take after Heraclitus, before we returned to plan and define a logic of links, where opposites are not destined to mutually exclude each other?

Montesquieu's splendid definition, "l'homme, cet être flexible," which has not been adequately expanded on, certainly cannot hide the extraordinary propensity for the rigid that characterizes our species. Freud referred to three narcissistic blows, that belittle man in his own eyes: that of Copernicus, that of Darwin, and finally, that for which psychoanalysis is responsible, insofar as it demonstrates that man is not the master in his own house (see Freud, "A Difficulty in the Path of Psychoanalysis"). Three blows to our vanity, to which a fourth seems to be added nowadays: the possibility that we will be replaced by machinery not only for the performance of manual tasks, but also intellectual ones. In actual fact, machines are able to equal and surpass our mental capacities as long as they move in the dimension of the rigid. Whenever thought follows paths that are entirely articulated, segmented or unequivocal in areas which can be clearly and precisely circumscribed by a frame—as in the case of a chessboard, to mention one example where the superiority of procedures based on the aforementioned criteria has imposed itself—, then humanity appears *simulatable* and surpassable. This then is the fourth narcissistic blow: to have to realize that 99% of our intelligence could be governed by rigidity, and that human creativity depends on a mere 1%, in other words a tiny remnant that is also the driving force behind wonderful conquests.

Now, the rigid view of the Symbolic does not appear to us to be like a crude mistake, but more like an excusable fallacy. And yet, if the human condition finds its greatest possibilities in flexibility, this *fallacy*, this deformation of perspective weighs on Lacan's Symbolic as much as the dwarf on Zarathustra's shoulder (Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Third Part, "On the

³ A parricide? An *Aufhebung*? We will see, but in any case, not a simple negation.

⁴ The best confirmation of this missed opportunity may be seen in the blunt comment of Jacques-Alain Miller, according to whom "The Purloined Letter" is "a children's story" (*Detached pieces*. The texts come from a course given by Miller—*Pièces détachées*—in Paris in 2004-05 and published in *La cause freudienne*). For a reinterpretation of Lacan's interpretation, see Bottirolì, *Che cos'è la teoria della letteratura* 178–88.

To Be and Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

Vision and the Riddle"). Is it not perhaps the spirit of gravity that has accentuated the punitive and privative position in the Symbolic?

A different view of the Symbolic will change the whole theory of registers and even the conception of desire. This leads to the need for a parricide, for which a first formulation is offered here: *higher than the theory of registers stands the thought of flexibility, the philosophy of the Metis.*

2. The Modal Revolution and Its Categories

Although I am obliged to present the concept of flexibility in just a few pages and very schematically, I trust that the essential points will be clear. I will be very brief, even later on when I mention the limits and errors in Lacan's theory: what counts, apart from clarity, is the vision as a whole. We need to understand how bad coherence hinders better coherence.

Let us begin by defining flexibility. What are the foundations and the role of a notion which, according to the most widely spread habits, seems to be easily grasped and unrelated to the philosophical dimension? The fact that little attention has been paid to this category should not astonish us: as we have just said, our culture has mainly looked for the possibility of survival, control of the environment, social organization, and so on, in rigid procedures. However, something has changed over the last two centuries, starting from Romanticism; and many changes are still in progress. Today, the greatest danger is that rigid intelligence restrains human beings below their superior possibilities. Therefore, the notion of flexibility must not be bent or confined to adaptive behaviours that are sensitive to their contexts, but should be understood as a *philosophical category*, that is as one of the supreme concepts, one of the concepts that perform an essential and strategic function in the organization of a theory: these are the categories—not general labels, but *principles* endowed with productive and heuristic strength.

Firstly, then, flexibility is a philosophical category; secondly, it is a *modal category*. Once again, it is no surprise to realize that it has never belonged to the modal categories contemplated by tradition, and referred to by Kant in *Critique of Pure Reason*: possibility–impossibility, existence–non-existence, necessity–contingency. This list is governed implicitly by rigidity: created by gradual restriction, it delineates the space of the possibility, which is selected by the actuality and culminates in necessity, in other words, in “what cannot be otherwise.” Let us suppose, though, that we eliminate the category of necessity, that many are wary of: possibility, in any case, remains ontologically inferior to actuality. However, in modern philosophy, another perspective first announced by Heidegger, has gained ground: “Higher than actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] stands *possibility*” (*Being and Time* 36).

In my interpretation, this is the announcement of a *modal revolution*: the classic doctrine of modalities (as I will call it) assigned the lowest rank to possibility. Heidegger upturns this doctrine, but without revealing the reason behind this reversal and without developing its consequences, which are only hinted at. However, it is evident that, in the new theory, possibility can no longer be understood as “*not yet real and not always necessary*” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 139): possibility has become power—the Nietzschean “will to power.”

Yet, there is another decisive choice to be made: indeed, power can either be conceived of as energy, *élan vital*, the proliferating of the multiple, and this is the simplest path, already embarked upon by Bergson and taken up again by Deleuze, or as a conflict between possibilities, the active or superior ones and the reactive or inferior ones: this is Nietzsche's path and will also be the one of Heidegger and psychoanalysis, as they will attribute crucial importance to language.

Obviously, language too is reconsidered: it is no longer a tool of communication, governed by codes, but an entwinement and conflict of styles; to the first pair of new modal categories, that is *rigid* and *flexible*, another is added, *dense* and *articulated*. The work of art becomes the most appropriate opportunity for verifying the new doctrine, since the semantic density that all

To Be and Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

works tend towards, but which only some manage to achieve, is “the forever articulable,” the forever interpretable. And interpretation acquires a new and precise meaning: there is interpretation only where unprecedented articulations are experienced, in relation to possibilities.

But possibility as power, no longer subordinate to the rigid, demands a third pair of modal categories, which complete (at least temporarily) the new list of categories: the *undivided* and the *divided*. Is power not perhaps overcoming oneself, and one's own boundaries? “And this secret life itself spoke to me: ‘Behold,’ it said, ‘I am that *which must always overcome itself*.’” (Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 89).⁵ The will to power is the urge *not to coincide with oneself*. The *non* of non-coincidence then becomes the object of desire: returning to Lacan, the *non* becomes object (a) for the desire to be.

3. Ontology of Desire

Prior to Freud, the real and full-scale possibilities of the desire to be had never been analyzed. Of course, it had been appeared in a number of speeches, but always marginally. Philosophy was unable to imagine what this expression would unleash in a setting that was ill-prepared to understand the modes of non-coincidence. Ill-prepared—but, we should add, willing to exclude every non-separative conception of identity.

Some obstacles had to be removed: (a) the oblivion of ontological difference, that is to say the reduction of ontology to an *ontic*, to a philosophy of entities; (b) the primacy of properties over possibilities. These two obstacles were only overcome thanks to Heidegger, and a new horizon was opened up: instead of continuing to look for the properties common to all entities, Heidegger pointed out the difference between the entity that belongs to the modal blend of actuality (the innerworldly being) and the one that belongs to the blend of possibilities: *Dasein*, the entity that we ourselves are. I believe that in these extraordinary innovations we should see confirmation of my thesis that sees Heidegger as the main interpreter of the modal revolution, even though he did not know how to make it sufficiently explicit, nor sufficiently solid or complete. Nonetheless, for the first time human beings were defined in their ontological-modal condition: their being consists of the possibility to be.

There was a third obstacle, that Heidegger only sensed: (c) it was necessary to free oneself from what he called “the logic of the intellect” (“What is Metaphysics?” 85) that is to say the rigid, disjunctive or separative logic. It should not be got rid of or eliminated, because the separative is a style of thought that is essential in many situations and capable of achieving its own excellence, but it should be confined within its own boundaries. An ontology that is not restricted to the ontic requires a new logic that we can refer to using various expressions: *conjunctive logic*, insofar as it is in opposition to the separative one; *logic of flexibility*, as it rebels against the alliance that philosophical and logical thought established, maintained and still in part maintains with rigidity; *logic of correlatives*, because, as we will shortly see, this is the relationship that logic has always marginalized or excluded, from Aristotle to Frege; *logic of non-coincidence*, as it overturns the assumption of identity understood only in the mode of coincidence.

Now we are able to comprehend why the desire to be was never fully analyzed in all its actual possibilities, up until Freud. The verb *to be*, the most enigmatic of all the verbs, was constantly trivialized, even to the point of that total emptiness registered by Nietzsche: the last smoke of evaporating reality (*Twilight of Idols*). The desire to be was the desire *of being*, that is to say addressed towards the supreme entity (for example, Plato's ideas): in the *Symposium*, this desire separates itself from sensible things to rise towards the vast sea of Beauty. It was the desire for fullness, and it remains such in Sartre: an aspiration towards the synthesis between

⁵ “Und diess Geheimniss redete das Leben selber zu mir. ‘Siehe, sprach es, ich bin das, *was sich immer selber überwinden mus*.’” (Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra* 148).

To Be and Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

in-itself and for-itself. And, in the desire of synthesis, being continued to be marked by coincidence, if not by a static nature). According to the tradition that has established itself for so long and which we find today in the so-called analytical philosophy, the desire to be is not only subordinate to the desire to have but it is based on it. Desire is the wish to have a thing, whether it is sensible or meta empirical.

It could not be otherwise in the objective presence (*Vorhandenheit*) philosophies, which are hinged on the relationship between the subject and an object located in a frontal position and accessible with basic or technologically sophisticated tools, but which remains, in any case, *well apart*. The object offers itself to the gaze of the desire to have, it is a sight captured first and foremost with the eyes.

In order for the desire to be to detach itself from the desire to have and conquer its autonomy and its distinctiveness, the modal revolution is needed: *it is necessary to pass from identity to the modes of identity*. In fact, as long as the identity remains a separative relationship, that is a relationship that an entity has only with itself, the desire to be will return relentlessly to tread the path of the desire to have, or better the path of the entities defined by the *separative*. One may desire to be only in the mode of coincidence.

The possibility of non-coinciding and, therefore, of desiring non-coincidence, implies an ontology and a logic of the divided. Only if an entity is divisible, that is separable from itself, *only if its identity is defined primarily by the relationship with otherness*, will that entity experience the *non* in relation to what it is.

Freud called this possibility, and this process in which *idem* becomes *alter*, “identification.” Let’s content ourselves initially with this formulation, which we will obviously have to explore in depth. We must not think that *idem* refers to a “stably formed” subject: on the contrary, identification is possible as the subject, which we could call *x* to underline its incompleteness, is an entity “that has not yet been established.”⁶ This means “potentially never establishable”: is this not perhaps what Faust’s bet is all about? Not being satisfied with any form that existence may assume. Overcoming oneself. Being an overcoming entity.

A process of identification can involve more or less radical and more or less lasting changes for subject *x*. The change may reach an extreme level of intensity without being long-lasting: this is what happens to Dante in Canto V of *Inferno*, when he identifies himself—according to Borges’ hypothesis—with Francesca and her companion:

“Dante relates the fate of the two lovers with an infinite pity, and we sense that he envies their fate. Paolo and Francesca are in Hell and he will be saved, but they have loved and he never won the love of the woman he loved, Beatrice. There is a certain injustice to this, and Dante must feel it as something terrible, now that he is separated from her. In contrast, these two sinners are together. They cannot speak to each other, they turn in the black whirlwind without hope, yet they are together. When she speaks, she says “we”, speaking for the two of them, another form of being together. They are together for eternity; they share Hell – and that, for Dante, must have been a kind of Paradise.

We know that he is quite moved. He then collapses as though he were dead. (Borges, *Seven Nights* 18)⁷

His fainting was probably caused by one of the most conflictual forms of identification: in any case, it involves a short identification. But the identifications described by Freud concern processes of formation (and remodelling) of the personality, the consequences of which are

⁶ “[M]an is the animal that has not yet been established” (Nietzsche, *Beyond good and evil* 68).

⁷ See also “I think of Paolo and Francesca, forever united in their Inferno: ‘*Questi, che mai da me non fia diviso*’ (this one, who never shall be parted from me). With appalling love, with anxiety, with admiration, with envy” (Borges, *The Total Library* 301).

To Be *and* Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

deep and lasting. Identity for Freud consists of a series of identifications: this is the theory of "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego."

4. The Relationships between *X* and *Alter*

Thanks to Freud and to Heidegger, the verb *to be* has now come to suggest a conflictual dimension, the struggle between two possibilities, between two possible ways of being. Yet the theory of the divided subject cannot limit itself to this first fundamental distinction. Let us consider more closely the relationships between a subject that we prefer to call *x* instead of *idem*, insofar as it is already a "non-*idem*," and *alter*, with which we will refer to all the possible modes of otherness.

The desire to be has entered the conflict between the will of coincidence and the will of non-coincidence. However, this second drive is faced by two possibilities: (a) it may exalt the subject, which sees in otherness, especially when it is represented by eminent models, a source of inspiration that stimulates it towards a creative emulation: didn't the great artists of the Renaissance perhaps start by copying their masters before surpassing them? Even Leonardo da Vinci agreed to "becoming *alter*" for a short period, joining Verrocchio's workshop—before becoming himself. Or (b) it may constitute the objective on which the subject runs aground.

Everything depends on the style of identification: *distinctive* in the first case, *confusive* in the second. Literature offers many examples of confusive identification: Don Quixote and the heroes of the cavalry, Emma Bovary and the romantic heroines of the books she read at boarding school, Dorian Gray and the protagonist of *A rebours*, etc., as well as examples of distinctive identification: Julien Sorel and Napoleon, Raskol'nikov and the superior men, etc. Having ignored this difference is what makes the concept of mimetic desire so schematic and unpolished in René Girard, who considers all identifications as alienations. The great error, Girard's disastrous simplification, consists of having reduced the desire to be to mimetic desire. On the contrary, for Freud and Lacan no identity can constitute itself unless it is through processes of "becoming other," but this does not exclude the possibility of subsequently conquering a unique, creative and unrepeatable form.

We have to examine the confusive more accurately: even when it is absorbed by the model to the point that there is a complete or almost complete loss of self, the subject incurs a debt of gratitude towards the model which has allowed the person to overcome him or herself, to go beyond the boundaries of a mediocre existence. What would Emma's life have been like if she had continued to be Charles Bovary's faithful wife? How often would she have imagined seeing the bitterness of her existence served up on her plate?⁸ So the confusive is an opportunity for a superior life, although it involves a permanent threat to one's own individuality. Having said this though, there is no intention to legitimize every decision to adopt mimetic behaviour: what then is the difference between Emma's *influencers* and those who today

⁸ "Mais c'était surtout aux heures des repas qu'elle n'en pouvait plus, dans cette petite salle au rez-de-chaussée, avec le poêle qui fumait, la porte qui criait, les murs qui suintaient, les pavés humides; toute l'amertume de l'existence lui semblait servie sur son assiette, et, à la fumée du bouilli, il montait du fond de son âme comme d'autres bouffées d'affadissement. Charles était long à manger; elle grignotait quelques noisettes, ou bien, appuyée du coude, s'amusait, avec la pointe de son couteau, à faire des raies sur la toile cirée" (Flaubert, *Madame Bovary* 67). "It was at meal-times that her endurance was strained to the furthest, in that little ground-floor living-room with its smoking stove, squeaking door, running walls and damp flagstones. She seemed to have all the bitterness of life served up on her plate; the steam from the stew conjured up like fumes of nausea from the depths of her soul. Charles was a slow eater. She used to nibble a few nuts, or lean her elbow on the table and beguile the time by tracing little lines on the oil-cloth with the tip of her knife" (Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*. Translated by Alan Russell, 79). This passage is quoted and commented on by Erich Auerbach (*Mimesis*).

To Be *and* Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

trivialize women's existence? Is it not perhaps the desire for the absolute, the vocation for an otherness that can cross stereotypes? Could it not be that the fascination of Flaubert's wonderful character depends on the conflict between slavery to stereotypes and a strength that does not allow oneself to be imprisoned by them?

So, we must avoid all easy schematizations: the theory must remain ductile, the concepts must not aim at a taxonomic, but rather a heuristic outcome.

I started by examining the relations between x and *alter*, considering the relationships between a subject and a model, that is the relationships between two identities: the first is determined by the relationship with the second. This is what a *dividing and conjunctive relationship* is: an entity denies coincidence with itself thanks to a relationship with another entity that lets itself be modelled by to different extents and into different forms. This is the most evident mode of the desire to be, and it is also the one that more clearly reveals the existence of a non-rigid logic. Identification is a fundamental process for the formation of identity in human beings: and yet, the logic that began with Aristotle, and which has become the modern, formal logic, is trapped in separative relations. Its very principles forbid it from thinking of the processes by which we become what we are. It resembles—taking up Wittgenstein's metaphor—a fly trapped in a fly-bottle that constantly tries to find a way out and only bangs against the side.

We could say that the separative logic is able to conceive of identity in the mode of coincidence, and so maintains its validity with respect to at least a part—perhaps the greatest part—of the processes of which our identity consists. It is true: rigid logic corresponds to our rigidity, to the effects of becoming rigid. It is not false, but fallacious. A fallacy is not a banal mistake, but it is a deformation, a reduction, a distortion. It would be odd if separative logic had been able to dominate for so many centuries and even today, if it were simply wrong.

Shortly before, the preponderance of the rigid in intellectual processes was posited. However, identity does not depend only on intellectual processes, but also on the *desire to be*; therefore, separative relations are perhaps the most numerous from the point of view of statistics as they include the countless contacts that occur in daily life even between strangers (relations between customers in shops, people who get on the same train, etc.), but they are not the most important or decisive. Their importance seems greater if we consider the lives of adults, in other words of people who seem to have completed the process of formation, and who very often content themselves with what they have become. Yet every adult has lived in the condition of an x forced to look for his own form in otherness: the possibility that he has lost all strength to overcome does not mean to say that he has never experienced it at least once (in actual fact, it is experienced at least a certain number of times, even in the case of the simplest human identities).

The more dynamic societies become, the more the number and importance of surpassing or conjunctive relations become. It is not just by chance that this type of relation has increased in the bourgeois society, the one in which “all that is solid melts into the air” (Marx and Engels ch. 1 par. 18); and it is not just a fluke that the *coming-of-age novel*, the *Bildungsroman*, came into being and developed in modern times. Not only this: the *coming-of-age novel* may be considered “the essence” of the novel, that is the construction method that best expresses its potentialities. The protagonists of epic poetry were almost always adults and, therefore, (with some exceptions) characters who were already generally stabilized. They had already overcome the “shadow line,” to quote one of Conrad's tales. However, anyone who is tempted to extend this consideration to the heroes of tragedy, who from a biographical point of view are adults, risks misunderstanding completely the nature of the tragic: in fact, the tragic hero is an individual who is strongly destabilized by an event that disrupts his way of life, and forces him to make a decision that is so great and heavy that he will be crushed by it.

The event that triggers the tragic narration is always traumatic: the reply of the oracle (“You will kill your father and marry your mother”) to Oedipus' question; Jason's repudiation which

To Be and Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

inflicts an intolerable wound on Medea; Creonte's decree that forbids the burial of Polynices and condemns him to a "second death," that of being denied the ritual of mourning and being cancelled from men's memories, etc.. It is the appearance of a figure from beyond the grave who reveals a terrible event in the case of Hamlet: a relatively young hero, whose identity is shaken, knocked "out of joint," by this revelation. In fact, it is not the world in general, but Hamlet's being that is disrupted, and which must find a form again.

On this occasion, I cannot dwell on a phenomenology of the traumatic event, but it is worth highlighting the possibility that it comes *from within*, that is to say from the character's psyche: is this not perhaps the case of Jim in Conrad's novel when he abandons his ship in distress?

5. The Identity of the Tragic Hero

Why does the modern novel begin with *Don Quixote*? At first glance, the work by Cervantes cannot be considered a *coming-of-age novel*, as the protagonist is anything but young. However, the biographical age is less important than it might seem from a purely descriptive point of view: in this case, the trauma is represented by the reading of some books; the character's mind is disrupted, he becomes a *limit-surpassing* character in the sense defined up until now. He is sucked into otherness, and thus shaped according to a confusive style. Don Quixote *again becomes* an x , he returns to the condition of someone lacking form and can only find it outside himself.

In Cervantes, an individual x frees himself of his coincidence with himself (a hidalgo, etc.), he discards it, he chooses the path of non-coincidence, but to emerge in a no less rigid identity than the one he wanted to escape from—and this is what gives rise to the comedy of the novel. In any case, *alter* acts as a model. As we said shortly before, the relationship with a model represents only one of the ways of overcoming oneself. At other times, the drive to exceed one's own limits derives from an overabundance of life: we do not find, at least not explicitly, a model for Ulysses or for Faust. We do not even find it in the case of the tragic character; nevertheless, his vocation to go beyond is undeniable. He violates the condition of *averageness*, in which all or almost all the other characters live, and his self-same averageness, that is the possibility to live in the socially assigned spaces, in the foreseen roles.⁹ Oedipus could have ignored the insult of a playmate, and continued to live as the son of the Corinthian sovereigns; Medea could have resigned herself to her condition of being shunned, and not have committed the terrible crime, which the woman deems "necessary"—which does not mean obligatory;¹⁰ Antigone could have shared Ismene's prudent choice. In the tragic character's decision there is an excess, an arrogance that pushes him or her simultaneously in opposite directions. Therefore, the schematic diagram of his or her identity in fig. 1 seems plausible.¹¹

By joining the upper and the lower vertexes to each other, the arrows indicate a relationship between *correlatives*, in other words between two opposites that involve each other reciprocally. Let us take the case of Oedipus: he is judged by his fellow citizens to be "the first amongst men" as he freed Thebes from the "singing bitch"; he is defined as the "best among mortals," the only one who can cure the city of the disease that has assailed it. Oedipus is a hero of intelligence, and his is an intelligence that loves to challenge enigmas. At the same time, he

⁹ I take up this notion from Heidegger, who in *Being and Time* refers to it with the term *Durchschnittlichkeit* (we can also translate it as "mean condition").

¹⁰ "ἀλλ' εἴ' ὀπλιζου, καρδία. τί μέλλομεν τὰ δεινὰ κἀναγκαῖα μὴ πράσσειν κακά"; (Nay, steel thyself my heart. Why linger we as not to do that horrendous yet necessary action? (Euripides, *Medea* 1242–43; the translation has been modified).

¹¹ For this scheme, see Bottirolì, *Liberatore e incatenato* (in particular, 65–67).

To Be and Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

bears the responsibility for two terrible sins, parricide and incest; thus, he is the worst of men, a blemish for his city, and he himself will ask to be expelled from Thebes. *Oedipus is a relationship between extremes, the link between two overcomings.* All this should appear indisputable, and offer a first confirmation of the pertinence and heuristic value of the diagram presented here. Some perplexity may arise with regard to the simultaneousness of the two movements beyond averageness: it could be asserted that Oedipus first becomes the best among mortals by beating the Sphinx, and only later, after discovering his faults and Jocasta's

suicide, does he become the most wretched of all. On closer inspection, we can see that all his actions are linked together; therefore, as Freud observed, the fact that Oedipus takes responsibility even for the deeds he committed unwittingly appears convincing for the reader (or spectator); and this, undoubtedly, derives from Sophocles' artistic choice, which, in *Oedipus Rex*, does not present a linear narration of the facts, but involves us in a great flashback. Thus, the two sides of Oedipus show a non-contingent weld.

It is worth noting that this interpretation is more Nietzschean than Freudian, as it attributes the same significance to Oedipus' excesses, to the overabundance of his intellectual talent that drives him to the upper vertex as the transgressions that restrict him to the lower vertex (Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* ch. 9)—at least in this work, because *Oedipus at Colonus* offers a completely *extramoral* vision of the character who becomes a beneficial force for the city that welcomes him. So, the desire to be in Oedipus is not only the desire to be the father.

6. Being the Object of Desire

Let us return to Freud and the distinctions made in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. There are two possible types of identification involved in the relationship between two individuals: the first type—which we discussed in section 4—consists in the desire to be a model (or a model/rival), the second in the desire to be an object. This possibility appears to be more complex, or at least more convoluted, than the first: shouldn't the desired object be the aim only of the desire to have? This, however, is not the case in love. Not only is object-libido, what Freud termed as "investment in objects," directed towards the loved one, that is to say the desire to have, but also a power to surpass: in love the investment in objects and identification intertwine (and reinforce each other reciprocally) (Freud, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" ch. 8).

The processes of identification confirm the plasticity of drives to no lesser degree than investments in objects. When Freud dismantles the drive into 4 factors (pressure, source, object, aim), he affirms that the object is the most variable element or factor (Freud, "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes" 122): but, in the first essay of *Metapsychology*, the importance and the role of identification have not yet been fully recognized. However, Freud is now beginning to understand the relevance of this process, so much so that in the last meta psychological essay,

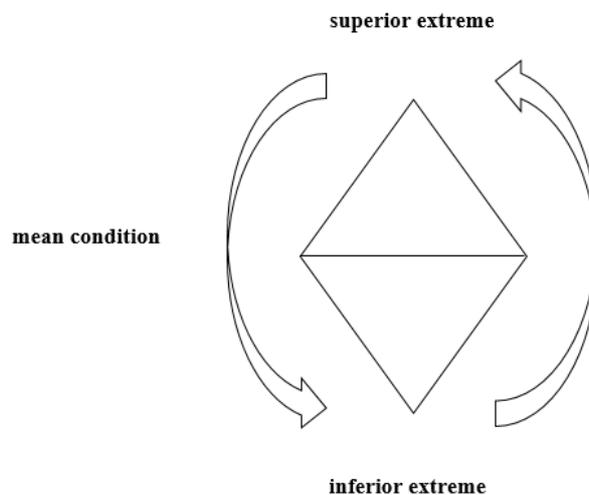


Fig. 1. A schematic diagram of the tragic character's identity.

To Be *and* Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

“Mourning and melancholia,” identification has leapt to the fore. It will be melancholy that offers the strongest proof for the theory by which love entwines the desire to be with the desire to have: that which can remain hidden in happy love emerges with devastating effects in unhappy love. In love, the subject has ceded a considerable part of his or her narcissism to the beloved: this gift, which is so rash, has no consequence (and the subject does not necessarily have any perception of it) until such time as it is reciprocated. Yet, if the subject is abandoned, he must realize that his loss does not begin beyond his boundaries, but within them: he has lost a part of himself. Freud’s magnificent expression, “the shadow of the object fell upon the ego” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 249), indicates the irruption of a void in the subject’s psyche. It is as if “a foreign territory had opened up internally,” to return to the expression with which Freud refers to the unconscious (“New Introductory Lectures On Psycho-Analysis” 57). Yet there is a great difference between the unconscious and the lost object: the unconscious, after all, includes energies and possibilities that belong to the subject, desires that he can reconquer by means of interpretation, so, to a certain extent the unconscious continues to uphold him and to drive him forwards; on the contrary, the lost object does not play any beneficial role by itself; it may become an opportunity to redefine oneself only in a remote time and it is quite difficult to work through.

Nonetheless, as we have just said, identification offers a confirmation, perhaps the most important, of the plasticity of human beings. No other species seems to possess this ductility, in the possibilities that it offers. *Cet être flexible* is characterized not only by a *minor* flexibility, which is adaptive, applicative, capable of exploiting contexts, of effortlessly changing and replacing objects, but also a *major* flexibility, thanks to which it can overcome the limits of its own identity. In the major flexibility we have to recognize the *idion* of the human condition.¹² We are beings capable of overcoming, of not coinciding with ourselves, thanks to the desire to be.

Let’s return to love and melancholy. The loss of a beloved one can lead to devastating consequences: and everything begins the moment the subject starts to become the object of desire. We can lose someone in various ways, through death or a separation that is too prolonged and unbearable: Ophelia loses Hamlet when she believes he has been torn apart by madness. She describes him in the following terms to Polonius:

My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,
Lord Hamlet with his doublet all unbraced,
No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,
Ungartered, and down-gyvèd to his ancle,
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been loosèd out of hell
To speak of horrors - he comes before me (II.1.76–83).

Hamlet undoubtedly represents an image of perfection, an ideal Ego, a narcissistic imago for Ophelia: and as she has identified herself with Hamlet, being in love with him Ophelia is destined to suffer the same disintegration.

7. Brief Summary: Three Theorems of the Modal Revolution

What is Hamlet’s desire? The question was raised at the beginning of this investigation: a question that cannot be posed ingenuously, because desire is one of the most enigmatic

¹² The *idion* is an Aristotelian concept: it indicates a universality that differs from essence.

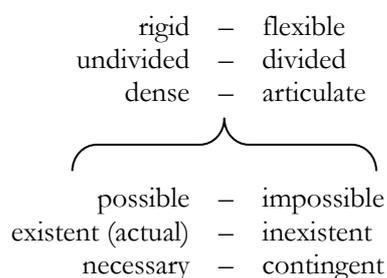
To Be *and* Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

characteristics of the entity that we ourselves are. I have tried to define the essential features of ontology and the logic of desire from the perspective of the modal revolution that for me represents the most articulate and fruitful possibility of philosophical intelligence, but also the one addressed to the analysis of works of art.

The first theorem (to use the language of Spinoza) of the modal revolution may be formulated thus: being is *modus*, and the *modus* is conflict, *polemos*. More explicitly, being always gives itself in modes of being.¹³

This not only implies a movement of Copernican rotation, which involves making all the factual categories rotate around the modal ones, as indicated by the classic doctrine of modalities, but also the introduction of new categories that must be placed in the position of command:



The new modal categories dominate over those of the classical theory, “they are higher up,” and as a result of this superior position, they modify the meaning of the old categories. The possibility is no longer simply “the *not yet* actual and *not always* necessary”: it becomes a conflictual space where the inferior (or reactive) possibilities fight the superior (or active) possibilities. It is *power*, but not simply production, as Deleuze would have it in the wake of Bergson. Thanks to the new theory of modalities, we are able to understand how Bergson’s and Deleuze’s proposal to replace “possible-actual” with “virtual/actual” is a small reform and a great mystification.

Bergson deplored the fact that possibility could be understood only in its logical meaning, as “non- impossibility”; and, above all, he rebelled against the idea that the field of possibles was already articulate (a paradigmatic example: “tomorrow it will rain or it won’t rain”), and so he did not admit the emergence of the unpredictable. But his emphasizing of the possible as superior to the actual, his idea of “virtual” as that which overcomes its accomplishments, is commendable but it remains a small reform: in fact, it exhausts itself in the old doctrine, and in its oppositional pairs. Bergson proposes an *energetist* interpretation of the modal space, which means: (i) the possible/virtual flows into the actual, but overflows, returns to itself to gain strength; (ii) the area of the necessary is eliminated; (iii) the impetus of the possible (*l’elan vital*) expresses itself mainly in the proliferation of the multiple.

Instead, in the perspective I have defined and outlined in the diagram above, the necessity is not eliminated, but radically changes its meaning and its function: it selects the superior possibilities that oppose the contingent ones. In this way Hamlet’s inertia—we can say in advance—may be interpreted not simply as a paralysis, but rather as a search for his superior

¹³ In this section, I try to point out the theses and results of *La ragione flessibile*. I consider my text to be like a logical-ontological *Tractatus*, even though it is presented in the form of an essay. It would have been rather naive and inappropriate for the spirit of the time to adopt an overly systematic form of presentation; furthermore, it would have led to an abandonment, even if partial, of the flexibility inspiring my book, with the consequent opportunities for further investigations. Another subheading could be added to the one that I have chosen, “Modes of Being and Styles of Thought,” and that would be: “Ontology *More Strategico Demonstrata*.”

To Be and Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

possibilities. *Furthermore, we need to underline the difference between an overflowing of energies and the search for the non-coincidence.* We should not allow ourselves to be hypnotized by deceptive similarities, that is to say by the primacy of becoming, and by the metamorphic tension: the processes are quite different. The energetist *débordement* is perfectly compatible with a conception of the undivided subject, who transforms himself from the “proprietary” and mereological point of view, but never enters the relational and modal field, as we are defining it. He remains a subject of coincidence, even if it is in the most dynamic meaning possible. Nietzschean *Überwindung* is another thing.

The second theorem of the modal revolution affirms the pluralism and the conflict also in the dimension of the logic: *the conjunctive logics oppose the disjunctive (or separative) logics.* On closer inspection, we are dealing with two families, the second of which is more varied and complex than the first, insofar as it immediately demands the distinction between the distinctive and the confusive style. The link between logic and ontology should be underlined: as in every relationship between correlatives, the opposites can paralyze or confirm each other dogmatically, or destabilize and intensify each other in their reciprocity. In this way, a separative logic will offer (or will believe it offers) a final confirmation to ontology of the objective presence (*Vorhandenheit*), to ontology reduced to the ontic, to the ontology of entities that coincide with themselves). On the contrary, *a conjunctive and therefore dividing logic (in the version of flexibility)* will indicate the paths of non-coincidence.

The *non* of non-coincidence, that does not get bogged down in *alter*, is the *non* of the will to power: it is more affirmative than any (simple) affirmation.

We are able to add a third theorem, regarding desire. Firstly, desire also gives itself in two different ways, splitting into *desire to be* and *desire to have*. Both, undoubtedly, concern the identity of the subject, but from this point of view the desire to be is more important. We must counter the tendency to subordinate it to the desire to have. The desire to be must be understood in the entirety of its possibilities; it implies processes of “othering”: “Je est un autre.” Following Freud, we need to distinguish the relationships of *x* with *alter*, as model/rival, and as object. But we also need to consider a possibility that has escaped psychoanalysis and which is exemplified by the tragic hero: the overcoming of averageness and the movement towards two extremes which are linked to each other.

8. The Desire to Be and Psychoanalysis

It is not only for this reason that in psychoanalysis the ontology of desire proves to be inadequate and open to criticism. Let's start by examining the position of Freud, whom we have acknowledged to be the first to have defined in a precise way the theory of identity as being equivalent to processes of identification. There is no need to reaffirm the exceptional importance, also from a philosophical point of view, of “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego” (1921). Unfortunately, Freud does not seem to have realized the importance of his achievement; in fact, one year later, in “The Ego and the Id,” he went back to proposing a mereological concept of the subject; but Freud's greatest limitation consists in having subordinated the desire to be to the desire to have, as can easily be verified if we examine the Oedipus complex.

Here we see the two modes of desire united: the desire to be the father, in the sense of rivalry which aims at substitution, and the desire to possess the incestuous object. The Freudian reading of Sophocles' *Oedipus rex* confirms this nexus of subordination: even if unconsciously, parricide is committed in relation to the incest, consequently the Greek hero's sense of guilt in not refusing to consider himself responsible for his actions is psychologically right. Freud adds that, being more fortunate than Oedipus, we limit ourselves to desiring what he

To Be and Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

has done (Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*). So, the complex bearing the name of the Greek character seems to be hinged on the “triangulation of having,” what we could call:

the desiring subject – the Law and its prohibition - the desired and prohibited object.

Overcoming the Oedipus complex, which is necessary if the individual is to integrate socially, requires the acceptance of the law, and the renouncement of the object of desire: the desire to have runs along the path of substitutions, which includes renouncing to be the father (if to be = to replace) and access to substitutive objects (other people, when the subject enters adulthood). It should, therefore, be noted how the Oedipus complex and the triangulation of having inevitably suggest a *substitutive conception*.

It is a known fact that Lacan reinterpreted the Freudian Oedipus to the point of overturning it, insofar as it is the mother who finds herself in the position of the desiring subject: what does a woman want—as only a mother or as a woman in general? She desires what she lacks. The object of such a lack is shown by Lacan to be the Phallus: it follows that the first fundamental desire for the child will be that of being the mother's Phallus. Thus, the desire to be finds its first mode of expression. As far as the paternal role is concerned, it continues to be exercised in the field of the Law, but not as a prohibition or threat addressed to the desire of the boy, but rather as protection for he who risk being absorbed, swallowed by a maternal will that is uncontrollable in its intensity.

At this point, we need to ask ourselves whether Lacan's overturning of the Oedipus complex has called into question the triangulation of having, or whether it has represented it in a wider and more precise form: and also more developed, because the space of the law is referred to with a name, the Symbolic, that comprises the whole culture, the society with its codes, including language. Such developments are undeniable, and do not concern only the Oedipus complex.

Thanks to Lacan, the relational concept of identity, launched by Freud, becomes a *modal concept*: what are, in fact, the three registers if not modes of experience, modes of being and, in the case of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, modes of thinking and looking? And again: *the three registers are modes of the relationship between x and alter*. In the Imaginary, the desire to be manifests itself in the highest degree of confusedness: the Ego is sucked in, inhaled by the ideal Ego, whether it wants it or not. In a wide range of fluctuations, we find Narcissus at one extreme, but also Dorian Gray, and at the other extreme Woody Allen's Zelig (1983), the human chameleon, who cannot help modelling himself on another, on any other with whom he comes into contact at any given moment.

As far as the Real is concerned, it represents an even more dissolutive aim, because a subject who addresses the desire to be towards the Real chooses the annihilation of self. Once again, we have a wide range of fluctuations and variations, from the absolute and unknown form, without properties, for example the Dame in courtly love, to the amorphous. And the Symbolic?

Only the Symbolic allows an individual to reach the fullness of his subjectivity and to gain access to the potentialities of his desire: because only in the Symbolic will he be able to find the tools for interpreting it. And faithfulness to one's own desire—according to Lacan, the only precept of psychoanalytical ethics—will remain an incomprehensible goal if the link with interpretation is broken. However, we must not think that interpretation can lead desire to absolute transparency! Interpretation is an activity of articulation and analysis, that disentwines: it opens up paths. Interpretation descends from Metis, and from Poros. Interpreting is deciding in the state of exception, when the will and the intellect are encumbered by dark clouds.

Anyone who knows Lacan realizes that this concept of interpretation is almost entirely missing from his work: this absence should be questioned. Why is there this gap in the

To Be *and* Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

Symbolic? At first glance, the Lacanian Symbolic seems to be like a great city, where all languages are spoken and where all the Culture is hosted insofar as it differs from Nature. This is certainly the case. And yet, if it is examined more carefully, the city seems to shrink to just one district, that of the Law, or to a series of districts that are too similar to each other. We realize that the languages are reduced to codes, and that the functioning of the language is governed by the "code/message" dialectic. In other words, in the Lacanian Symbolic, rigidity dominates: the minor flexibility is certainly there, but not the major one. The Lacanian Symbolic is an *undivided* register: this is the great limitation, the great mistake, because THE language does not exist, and it gives itself only in its own ways, that is styles: "logos is polemos," Heidegger would say, it is the space in which the styles of thought differentiate, entwine and fight with each other.

Objection will be made to the fact that a bar has been drawn through the Big Other: does this not perhaps indicate a division? The answer is no. The bar indicates the incompleteness of the Other, the inexistence of metalanguage, the theory by which the Other of the Other does not exist, but this does not lead to a *polemological* view of language or the downsizing of the "code/message." Let us try to clarify this point which is of fundamental importance.

9. The Greatest Fallacy: the Substitutive Symbolic

Lacan's research was blocked by a true and proper *epistemological obstacle*, to use Bachelard's terminology. And the root of this obstacle should be recognized in the poor combination between the primacy of the Law in the Oedipus complex and that of the code in modern linguistics: in both cases, it is easy to see how rigidity exerts conditioning. Another factor of inflexibility is Lacan's subjection to disjunctive logics.

Lacan's encounter with modern linguistics produced extremely innovative outcomes and, in particular, in the 1950s, the thesis according to which the unconscious is structured like a language. In this way, the centrality of the word, of the linguistic medium, found new purposes in the relationship between analyst and patient (or better: analysand). The diagnosis was also able to organize itself with greater precision: psychosis has been defined as the foreclosure of a fundamental signifier, the Name-of-the-Father. Was Lacan a structuralist? In part yes, and he had the ability to interpret some aspects of structuralism creatively: however, the main mediator of his relationship with modern linguistics was Roman Jakobson, a scholar whose proposals are today, to a large extent, outdated. Unfortunately, Jakobson fostered a regression compared with Saussure, who understood the *langue* not only to be a set of collective habits (basically what was called *code*), but as a field of virtuality. Starting from the diagram of the two fluxes, and from the concept of articulation ("language might be called the domain of articulations"; Saussure 112), it would have been possible to develop a theory of divided language. In what way? By thinking of the paradigmatic axis not as a "filing cabinet of *prefabricated* representations" (Jakobson 97), and therefore the dimension of the code, but rather as the fissure from which different styles arise, just one of which is the separative. I have presented this concept, which I have called *rain of styles*, elsewhere.¹⁴ Fig. 2 offers a graphic representation of the concept.

The separative, the distinctive (flexible rationality) and the confusive differentiate that field of possibilities that is language. Each text in a natural language is at least two styles woven together.

For Jakobson, on the other hand, the paradigmatic axis is structured *only by the separative*, which attributes to each sign an identity that tends to be rigid; and it contains a set of signs,

¹⁴ See Bottirolì, *La ragione flessibile* 261. I take the liberty of also referring to Bottirolì, *What is alive and what is dead in Jakobson. From codes to styles*.

To Be *and* Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

from which the speaker chooses each time to form a syntagma. The paradigmatic axis is also defined as the axis of substitutions because, according to requirements and to contexts, a term will be substituted with a term used in another context, or even just a moment before. Let us complete the picture: Jakobson attempts to reduce the rhetorical mechanisms drastically by coupling the metaphor and metonymy with the two Saussurian axes, placing the metaphor on the paradigmatic axis and metonymy on the syntagmatic axis. Why ever should he do that? For quite a banal reason, because in so doing he does nothing more than take up the traditional definitions of these two mechanisms; as the metaphor has been defined, since the time of Aristotle, as the substitution of one word with another on the basis of a nexus of similarity, he places it on the paradigmatic axis. In this way, though, without realizing it Jakobson repropose the old substitutive concept of the metaphor, which is almost completely deprived of value (and reserved only for simple, stereotyped cases) by Max Black, in an article of paramount importance published in 1954, at the same time as the work of the Russian linguist. Today, the substitutive conception of the metaphor appears to be completely obsolete and unacceptable.¹⁵ Unfortunately, Lacan endorsed it. Let us now see what disastrous effects it had on his research.

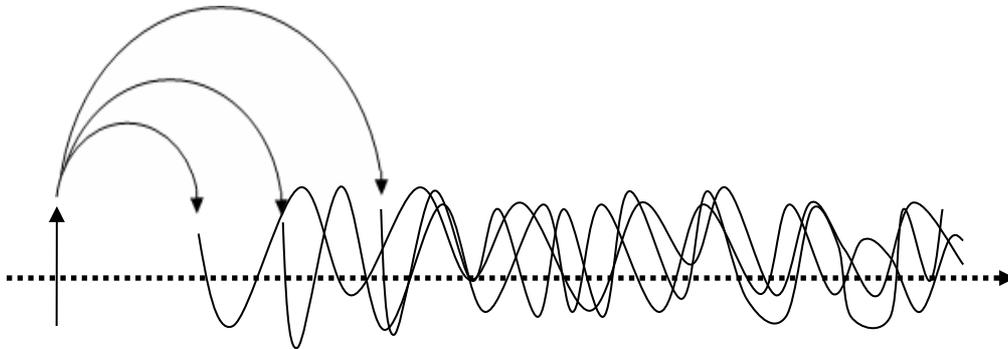


Fig. 2. The rain of styles.

Lacan derives the substitutive point of view from Jakobson and extends it to the Symbolic in its entirety: so Culture seems to be the substitute of Nature, and this relationship can be written as a fraction in which the numerator takes over the denominator; yet, the way in which substitutions are written is repeated many times; we will give just a few examples:

Culture	Name-of-the-Father	Language
----	-----	----
Nature	Desire of the mother	Jouissance

In the lectures presented by Jacques-Alain Miller, this procedure even becomes obsessive.

The substitutive conception appeared plausible to describe access to the Symbolic and the loss of enjoyment that follows as a result. Undoubtedly, submitting to the law implies a renunciation. But is the Symbolic only, or essentially, the Law? Lacan favoured a reduction, which for his followers has become a dogma. So Miller reached the point of saying “The Law of the Name-of-the-Father is basically nothing more than the law of language.” More precisely, the Law “says no, . . . says no because the field of language consists of this no” (Miller 130).

This reductionism is truly unacceptable: first and foremost, because Miller seems to have completely forgotten the lesson of structuralism according to which language consists of negative-differential relationships. Consequently, language does not say *no*; language says “non,” and the *non* is the activity of articulation.

¹⁵ This does not imply that the cognitivism developed by Black's intuition is without criticism.

To Be *and* Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

But it is not enough to rediscover the most fruitful lesson of structuralism, in which (as we have just seen) language remains undivided since the point of view of the code has made the dimension of the virtualities rigid. With what ingenuity and nonchalance does the same Lacan talk about “laws of language”? What are these laws? The need to perform two operations, the selection on the paradigmatic axis and the combination on the syntagmatic one, for each linguistic act? Was it necessary to wait for the genius of Saussure to proclaim this triviality? There are certainly some restraints that organize the activity of the speaker, for example the constriction of linearity: two sounds cannot be pronounced at the same time (see Saussure 70). But these restraints have quite a weak similarity with the laws, in the sense that they are formulated by science. So, let's abandon a sterile over-emphasis, and dedicate our research to the *possibilities of language*, as shown in an inaugural way by the rain of styles.

Language says “non.” Between the styles of thought, there are relationships of alternation, interweaving and combat. None of them can absorb the others or claim possession of their potentialities, although the Symbolic is the most complex: pluralism is irrepressible and fecund. This perspective induces us to overcome the substitutive conception of the Symbolic, and its punitive theorems. In fact, two theses derive from the substitutive concept: (a) the word kills the Thing; (b) the signifier castrates.

Let's start from the second thesis: the signifier *cuts* (and *transforms*), and does not necessarily castrate. It cuts in different ways as it can articulate without actually cutting. But, even when it cuts, it can act with effects of liberation and expansion. The *non* that cuts the bond of subordination between language and referent creates the autonomy of the language in relation with the actuality. However, the most fruitful and creative action of the *non* consists in the split between different styles, between different logics: in the production of the “non-coincidence” of a being with itself.

We will return to this later. For now, we must insist with the criticisms against a substitutive and punitive vision of language, which is often summarized in the thesis according to which language is allegedly a trauma. If this is the case, it should be specified: *felix trauma*, as its emancipatory potentialities are far superior to the repressive effects. Does language kill the Thing? This thesis too must be examined carefully, and not repeated as if it were a mantra.

First of all, we need to evaluate the two possible ways of writing this thesis, of Hegelian derivation: does language kill the Thing or does it kill things? In an essay of 1948, Blanchot quotes a passage from Hegel: “Adam's first act, which made him master of the animals, was to give them names, that is he annihilated them in their existence (as existing creatures)” (Blanchot, “Literature and the right to death” 323). Blanchot adds: “Hegel means that from that moment on the cat ceased to be a uniquely real cat and became an idea as well” (323). The rise of language therefore requires and determines, “a sort of immense hecatomb, a preliminary flood plunging all of creation into a total sea. God had created living things, but man had to annihilate them. Not until then did they take on meaning for him, and he in turn created them out of the death into which they had disappeared” (323). This was Hegel's thesis: the word kills the thing. This is undoubtedly a counter-intuitive, disconcerting thesis, which must be clarified: and, at least initially, if we clarify it, we will downsize its dramatic nature.

For Hegel every word, as a conveyor of a concept, is inevitably placed on the side of the Universal: by saying “cat” I name the species, not a particular cat; I evoke a concept, not a perception. Blanchot observes: “the word, always general, has always failed to capture what it names” (*The infinite conversation* 34). With undeniable reference to this conception, Lacan will write: “Thus the symbol first manifests itself as the killing of the thing” (“The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis” 262). However, it seems that the tragic pathos with which Hegel describes the passage from nature to culture can be considerably downsized; in fact, Blanchot specifies: “Certainly my language does not kill anyone” (93). Let's now proceed along the Hegelian line of thought, to understand it better. It is doubtful whether the

To Be *and* Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

Hegelian death is a true death. Language is *loss* as it can define things only in their “ideality,” in their abstraction, suppressing the particularities of the experience, the distinguishing features; but it is also *restoration, resurrection*. Luckily, my cat is not killed by the word “cat”: it is annihilated (that is disowned) in its specific existence, but restored in the form of the concept, of the meaning. Things die, but then rise again in the life of the spirit. This is why Hegelian death is not a true death, rather an “interiorized” death, which acts on behalf of that transposition that Hegel calls *Aufhebung*: so the word is “life that tolerates death and conserves itself in it” (Blanchot 98-99).

In an even further de-emphasized form, the thesis of loss is today proposed by cognitivism: language purportedly does not have such a fine grain as perception—which is certainly true if language is understood principally as lexis, as *labelling*. But was this vision of language not rejected a long time ago thanks to Saussure, Wittgenstein, and other authors? Isn't literature perhaps the greatest denial of the thesis of an inevitable impoverishment? Let's consider an example:

There was a rose, a single remaining rose. Through the sad, dead days of late summer it had continued to bloom, and now though persimmons had long swung their miniature suns among the caterpillar-festooned branches, and gum and maple and hickory had flaunted two gold and scarlet weeks, and the grass, where grandfathers of grasshoppers squatted sluggishly like sullen octogenarians, had been penciled twice delicately with frost, and the sunny noons were scented with sassafras, it still bloomed – overripe now, and a little gallantly blowsy, like a fading burlesque star. Miss Jenny worked in a sweater these days, and her trowel glinted in her earthy glove.

“It's like some women I've known,” she said. “It just don't know how to give up gracefully and be a grandmamma.” (Faulkner 224–25)

Would it have been possible to achieve the perception suggested in these few lines without language? Definitely not. More importantly, it would be impossible to see things in the way they are shown in more intensely metaphoric descriptions than this, and which only linguistic elaboration is able to create. Therefore, language is not only castration, loss of enjoyment, but an opening up to new possibilities of knowledge and enjoyment. However, it has to be recognized as being a field of agonistic articulations.

It is from this perspective that we can also assess the other writing of the Hegelian thesis: language kills the Thing, that is the drive, the real. The incandescence of drive is tempered by language, understood here more than ever as being equivalent to Law. Lacan talks about a lethal action of the signifier: but shouldn't we rather distinguish different possible actions? It must be borne in mind, however, that everything depends on the starting point or on the initial definition: if the drive is an impulse destined for an autistic circuit, if it is a figure of the One, as shown by the image of a mouth trying to kiss itself, then the signifier seems to be able to act only as a dampener or interruption. Or like a dam that deviates the flow in another direction, in this case towards otherness. And even if processes of potentially creative sublimation can be generated by deviating the drive in another direction, the strength of the *Trieb* continues to appear as a danger, and like an excess that has to be tamed. This view is not entirely wrong. Nevertheless, it is only partial, incomplete, unilateral: it hides a more complete vision, which Freud announced several times, when he underlined the plasticity of drives. On closer inspection, the drive reunites opposing determinations: it is an incentive to repetition and so to circularity and to fixation; it is an incredibly adhesive force. One of the most striking images of this adhesion is the stubbornness with which Narcissus, after his death, on the banks of the

To Be *and* Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

river Styx, continues to be attracted hypnotically by his reflection.¹⁶ At the same time though, drive is the most plastic of the forces, it is what fuels incessantly the flexibility of human beings. Without it, the tendency to coincide with oneself would impose itself without encountering any obstacles.

Therefore, the logic-ontologic conflict between coincidence and non-coincidence finds its *arché*, its beginning and its engine, in the duplicity of the *Trieb*. So, in the drive, we must know how to discern two movements of equal importance: on the one hand, it revolves around the object, it closes circularly on itself; on the other, drive sneaks into the articulations of the signifier, into its narrow passageways, its labyrinths, the roads that only it can open and reveal. In fact, if it does not enter the Symbolic, if it does not lubricate its rigidity, if it does not shake the entanglements of the signifiers, it remains a sterile activity. Drive needs the signifier in order not to be deprived of its plasticity, in order not to pour itself into the rigidity of the One or of the Multiple. On the contrary, the signifier should not perform an action that is almost entirely defensive if it wants to avoid taking on only rigid forms. We should bear in mind Nietzsche's description in *The Birth of Tragedy*: when the Greeks decide to oppose the Apollonian, like a head of Medusa, to the barbaric Dionysian, the result is Doric art that eternalizes "an attitude of majestic rejection" (20). However, before becoming "Socratized," this population was able to reconcile the two divinities of art: it was able to create the tragedy before the separative logic, and a sculpture in which the forms become sinuous, abandoning the former rigidity. Therefore, the relationship between drive and the signifier can be expressed in different ways.

We need to move on from "the signifier" to the "modes of the signifier."

10. How a Metaphor Works—The Backwardness of Lacan and the Lacanian Followers

Let's return to the problem of the metaphor. This problem cannot be considered marginal, and not only because the old rhetorical figures have revealed their pertinence with regard to the processes of the unconscious, condensation and displacement: the unconscious structured like a language is the unconscious, at least of the metaphor and of the metonymy. Lacan entrusted the metaphor with a crucial role, that of introducing the subject in the register of the Symbolic.

How does a metaphor work? According to a stereotype that is still widespread, the metaphor is a substitutive process, and its smallest dimension is a single word: the speaker could use a term that belongs to literal language and turn instead to an "inappropriate" term, that is a figure. He may want to (and could) say "Achilles is brave"; he prefers to say "Achilles is a lion." For a long time, and even now, examples of this type are considered to be good examples of metaphors. This is quite grotesque: if we were asked to state a paradigmatic example of a "bird" we would say the eagle and not the hen. Nonetheless, the examples that are always offered by the substitutive conception of the metaphor correspond to the less representative case.

Readers who know about the current debate regarding the metaphor will pardon me if I am about to refer to what everyone should know: those who are attached to the substitutive conception are today just Lacan's followers and a few other scholars. In 1954, Max Black

¹⁶ "Ille caput viridi fessum submitit in herba, / lumina nox clausit domini mirantia formam. / Tum quoque se, postquam est inferna sede receptus, / in Stygia spectabat aqua" ("At this he placed his head deep in cool grasses / while death shut fast the eyes that shone with light / at their own lustre. As he crossed the narrows / of darkest hell he saw the floating image / of his lost shade within the Stygian waters" (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* book III 502–05).

To Be *and* Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

published a seminal article which marked the way to a new conception: he called it *interactional*; this terminological choice is not entirely satisfactory, but it is the only element of his proposal that can be criticized. Thanks to Black, a turning point was reached of which I would like to mention the main features:

(a) The minimum dimension of the metaphor is not the single word, but rather the utterance. A paradigmatic example is: "man is a wolf."

(b) In order for there to be a metaphor, two terms are therefore needed, which Black calls *focus and frame*. In the example chosen, *wolf* is the *focus* (the metaphORIZING) and *man* is the *frame* (the metaphORIZED). The metaphoric process consists in the action exerted by the focus on the frame. This action is focalizing insofar as it *selects* some traits of the metaphORIZED, leaving others in the background, sedating them so to speak; it *emphasizes* these traits, and thus *re-describes* the starting term. In our example, the wolf picks out the aggressiveness and hazard-ousness that belong to our species, leaving other characteristics (the inclination towards social relations, empathy) in the background, it emphasizes the traits that it exposes, and thus offers a re-description of the relationships among men. The social animal of a long-standing tradition transforms itself into a being that is dangerous for its own kind, which inspires Hobbes' philosophy: *homo homini lupus*.

(c) Black calls the new viewpoint *interactional*. Interaction means a reciprocal action: undoubtedly, in this metaphor the man becomes wolf-like: it is the action exerted by the focus on the frame. As far as the inverse action is concerned, it is less perceivable: however, according to Black, here the wolf becomes humanized to a certain extent. Whether we admit it or not, what really counts is the passage from the vertical conception (substitutive) to a horizontal conception (transformative). We are dealing with an irreversible conquest.

I would prefer to distinguish the non-symmetric (or faintly symmetric) metaphors, such as "man is a wolf," from the metaphors in which the process of interaction develops to the full. With regard to this process, Proust offered a remarkable example in the pages in which he describes Elstir's "Marines": in this artist's paintings, the sea is described with terrestrial predicates, and the earth with marine predicates. The outstanding metaphors are metamorphoses, and here the metamorphosis is truly reciprocal (Proust, *Recherche* I 835–38; "In the shadow of young girls in flower" 415).

Whoever considers this example, which covers several pages, cannot help but judge the conception of the metaphor as being the substitution of one word for another, as being inappropriate, anachronistic, not to say ridiculous. The fact that this was upheld by Jakobson, a scholar who knew and loved literature, is quite disconcerting. As for Lacan, it is understandable in the 1950s, when structuralism started budding (and Black's article had not yet aroused such great interest), that he was struck by Jakobson's article, which subsequently met with considerable success. What is important, as we shall shortly see, is that the substitutive concept can be abandoned without damaging psychoanalysis, and, if anything, can favour a wider perspective.¹⁷

(d) why are metaphors created? For two reasons according to the substitutive concept: to fill lexical gaps or for aesthetic reasons. In the first case, the metaphoric quality of the term is short-lived, as the figure is codified by use (it becomes a catachresis); in the second case, an ornamental word is created which, even when it remains a metaphor, never has a cognitive value, that is it cannot be judged to be either true or false. As Greek philosophy had already clarified, the minimum dimension of any formulation that claims to be true is the statement:

¹⁷ Then again, Lacan himself knew how to quote metaphor-statements, for example: "Love is a pebble that laughs in the sun" ("L'amour est un caillou riant dans le soleil"; Paul Eluard) (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Psychoses* 226).

To Be and Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

“cat” is neither true nor false; whereas, we could judge the cognitive value of “cats are animals,” etc.

Although Aristotle had reduced the metaphor to the size of a word, with happy inconsistency, he had attributed to it cognitive potentialities, acknowledging that it also has the ability to describe with precision: whoever creates a good metaphor is comparable to an archer who hits the target, since he is endowed with *eustochia* (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III 1412a). Max Black is, therefore, a neo-Aristotelian, who has been able to give coherence to Aristotle's better intuition. But, in what way can a metaphor generate knowledge? By affirming that a metaphor creates similarities more than reflects those already given, he poses a new problem: his theory is incomprehensible as a result of the concept of truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei*, according to which to know means to reflect as faithfully as possible what actually is. As I have specified elsewhere, this concept implies that a true statement can be produced only in the modal blending of actuality, and by means of a separative style. The modal revolution questions this dogma, showing that various modal blends and various styles of rationality are possible. As already stated, desire is never simply a fact: the truth of the desire derives from interpretation. And the metaphor may be considered a mode of interpretation.

Let's now examine the problem of access to the Symbolic. For Freud, the door of law has a guardian, who is no less severe although less enigmatic than the one depicted in Kafka's parable. By definition, the law is impersonal, anonymous: it applies unconditionally to everyone, even the person issuing it. It becomes an arbitrary act when it evolves from the will of an individual: consequently, Antigone calls the prohibition to bury Polynices a decree (*keerygma*), and reminds the tyrant that a *keerygma* does not have the theoretical foundations of a *nomos* or of the *ágrapta nómina* (the laws not written by the gods) (Sophocles, *Antigone* 450–55). The law must not absorb drives that contradict universality, as for example the desire for revenge or pointless cruelty. When it respects this condition, the law is not simply a prohibition, but a limitation that generates new possibilities. In the Oedipus complex, the prohibition of incest, issued by the father, is what makes the process of civilization possible, the passage from Nature to Culture, so the formation of a subject who would otherwise remain fixed with a desire for fusion. Oedipus is a cut, an act of articulation that dilates and extends the space of life.

But the law is not a dematerialized voice shouting in the void, it always needs an incarnation. The Freudian father is a threatening figure, although the threat of castration belongs to the dimension that for Lacan is the Imaginary. He (the father) is so, regardless of his psychic and environmental reality, and of the traits characterizing him as an individual: even a kind father can be castrating (Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Formations of the Unconscious* [from now on, *Seminar V*] 151). Outlining the three times of the Oedipus complex, Lacan added to the first time, that is of the tendency towards a fusion between the mother and baby boy (the primary perversion), and to the second time, the one in which the father's prohibition intervenes (the terrible father), a third time, in which the figure of interdiction shows himself as *the father of the gift* (189). He is the father who humanizes life: “Castration is not actual castration. It's linked to a desire, as I have said. It's even linked to the evolution, progress and maturation of desire in the human subject” (289). As Recalcati underlines, *symbolic* castration—because this is how it should be understood—is not a punitive act or merely privative, but rather the way in which “the transmission of the desire in the chain of generations” occurs (Recalcati, *Jacques Lacan* 178).

Freud's fundamental concepts are reinterpreted by means of the theory of registers: the figure of the father will be different in the perspective of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. In the Oedipus complex, the father of the Law is a figure of the Symbolic. More precisely, says Lacan, “the father is a metaphor” (Lacan, *Seminar V* 158). And what is a metaphor? Because Lacan refers to Jakobson, he replies—and he could not reply otherwise—that a metaphor is a substitution: “A metaphor ... is a signifier that comes to take the place of another

To Be *and* Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

signifier.” And again: “The father’s function in the Oedipus complex is to be a signifier substituted for the first signifier introduced into symbolization, the maternal signifier. According to the formula that, as I once explained to you, was the formula for metaphor, the father comes to the place of the mother” (159).

On the previous pages, I referred to the reasons why this concept has now become obsolete and, above all, is misleading: its plausibility concerns only the simplest and most stereotypical cases. Can we content ourselves with this impoverished and distorted vision of the metaphor when we decide to examine the access to the Symbolic? Evidently not. However, it is a matter of showing the damage caused by the Jakobson-Lacan version.

The Law inhabits the space of the Other (symbolic). Its form is necessarily impersonal, as the universality to which it aspires involves overcoming the traits characterizing this or that individual. Therefore, the Law corresponds to a Code, to a set of rules that tend towards univocity and rigidity. And yet, as Lacan recalls, “The Other isn’t purely and simply the locus of this perfectly organized and fixed system” (Lacan, *Seminar V* 438). In its deliberately and fanatically anonymous version, the Law becomes something inhuman, and it is not able to introduce the subject to the dimension of desire. However, a *plurality of versions of the Law* exists and in one of these versions, the Father intervenes, not as a bearer or executor of the law, but rather as a fruitful supplement, a humanizing incarnation, in which he returns to exist as a person: he is the father of the gift, capable of showing something beyond the anonymous law. Lacan spoke of an additional message (136), and this indication was enhanced and developed by Recalcati in the sense of a *testimony*. The third time of the Oedipus complex is the one in which the father becomes the testimony of the singularity of desire (see Recalcati, *Cosa resta del padre?*; and Jacques Lacan 180).

I believe that this line of thought should be further developed. To overcome the perspective of the Symbolic crushed on the Law, it is not enough to insist on the need for the Law to become incarnate. As we have already said, the bar of the Great Other cannot be seen only as a sign of incompleteness, and must instead introduce the pluralism of styles: only in this way does the Symbolic become a *divided* register, within which the subject can experiment all the possibilities that are opened by its divisions.

But this is not enough: we need to introduce another distinction, to rid ourselves of the oppression exerted by the “code/message.” We must recognize two fundamental modes of Culture, which can express itself on the side of rules, but also on the side of the texts. I present the following diagram, before commenting on it:

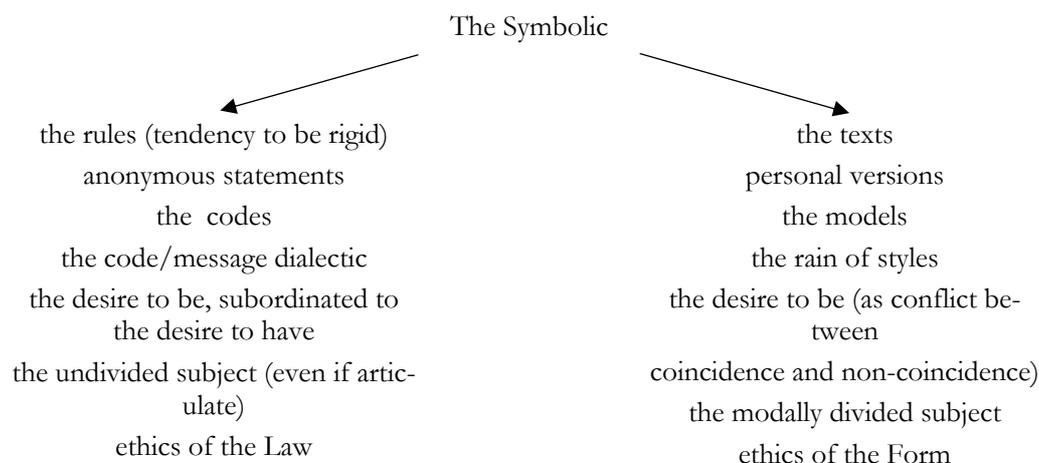


Fig. 3. Two fundamental modes of Culture.

To Be and Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

The fact that there are two modes of functioning of Culture, one directed towards rules and codes, the other towards texts and singularity, is one of the fundamental theses in Lotman's semiotics (see *Universe of the Mind*). This typology does not exclude the possibility that both can act in a certain vision of the world, with alternating prevalence: in this way, Christianity is founded both on rules (the ten commandments) and on an individual figure, Jesus, who offers himself as a modelling force (*Imitatio Christi*).

So, the Symbolic consists of two paths, which at certain times (and in certain cultures) may appear to be complementary, but they always end up fighting each other as they correspond to two modes of desire. On one side, the desire to have, which has to reckon with the Law as society cannot agree to its excesses; in this direction, the desire to be is not absent, but is shaped by the Law; and, as we will shortly see, the mechanism to which it must submit itself is not so much the metaphor as the synecdoche. In any case, the possibilities for interpretation appear to be quite limited. On the other side, instead, the desire to be unfolds with all its might, like *a desire without Law*. Not without models, but without the filter of the Law.

This mode of desire has found its highest expression and testimony in literature. It is the desire of the characters that we have already mentioned, Emma Bovary, Julien Sorel, Raskol'nikov, etc. Their models are romantic heroines, Napoleon Bonaparte, superior men: the attraction exerted by the models can be confusive—and, in any case, produce effects of liberation—or distinctive: in this case, the model is a true object of interpretation. It cannot be imitated, in fact the possibility of even an inferior imitation is doubted, yet it is considered a source of inspiration. The desire to be is the desire for non-coincidence with oneself, driven to the point of risking foundering in otherness. It is the desire for a *non* overcoming.

What it aims at is a form, a new singularity to be conquered. It is a desire without law insofar as it moves in a space that is unknown to the ethics of the law, and which we should rather define as an *ethics of form*. Is this not perhaps the path pointed out by Nietzsche?¹⁸

Accordingly, we need to distinguish the mode of being of those who wish to incarnate the Law, even in a non-punitive way (the father of the gift) and the mode of those who want to bypass the problem of the father, because nothing good seems to be able to come from any incarnation. This is the path of the artists, some of whom are dangerously exposed to dissolution as the inevitable outcome unless they know how to create a new language (or if they invent a language that is too close to *das Ding*).

This is why the two paths of the formation of a subject end up fighting each other: on one side, there is a tendency to recognize just one style of thought, and in this case the language becomes rigid in the code (and in the code/message dialectic); monostylism imposes itself, which is zerostylism; on the other side, there is the linguistic and logical pluralism, and the code corresponds to just one possibility, the separative style. In this perspective, the Oedipus complex is the time in which the subject risks losing his own flexibility, the drive to non-coincidence.

11. From the "manque-à-être" to the "n(Ich)t werden"

The father of the gift may, however, prove to possess more resources than were shown in *Seminar V*: amongst the gifts of life offered by a father, could there also be styles? The jury is

¹⁸ Each typology allows for in-between cases, for example Telemachus in *The Odyssey* who desires the return of a father (with whom he is not in conflict and to whom he may look as a model), but also the return of the Law, which had been suspended and mocked by the suitors of Penelope. Therefore, a sort of hybridization forms in the character of Telemachus, that Recalcati highlighted for its fruitfulness, referring to it also as a possibility for contemporary society: a possible identity, different to that of Oedipus and Narcissus (*Il complesso di Telemaco*).

To Be and Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

still out. I believe, in any case, to have shown that the desire to be is not adequately acknowledged by psychoanalysis due to a privileged orientation towards the dimension of the law. At the same time, I have tried to underline the great innovation of “Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego” which is the theory of identity as identification. The way of the models, as an alternative to that of the law, was perceived and enhanced by Freud. It is certainly so, but with considerable limitations, which Lacan never surpassed. Although he distinguished between two procedures of identification, imaginary and symbolic, Lacan never investigated the possibilities of non-coincidence. Is perhaps the reason for this inertia to be sought in an inadequate conception of *non*?

Lacan's *non* refers basically to a lack. Why is man the being who does not coincide with himself—as Sartre also claimed—unless it is due to a lack of something that empties him at least in part of his being? Sartre's *manque-d'être* becomes *manque-à-être*. With this modification, the desire of being (that can be reduced to a being, an entity) becomes the desire to be, but the aspiration to completeness seems unchanged: all the more so as the lack appears to be caused by the lost object, and by the separating action of the law. Maintaining this perspective, it seems truly difficult to develop the conception of a limit-surpassing subject.

The dissatisfaction with the notion of *lack* does not legitimize the alternative proposed by Deleuze, that is to say desire as production. Desire, as I have tried to define it, is will to power—and power cannot be reduced to the production of the multiple, of flows, etc. *The subject of Deleuze is still an undivided subject*, who overflows from himself, but who does not experience the relationships that the Symbolic consists of unless to a very limited extent.

To understand more clearly the path of *greater* flexibility, let's start again from one of Freud's famous formulations. At the end of lecture 31, he recommends carrying out a task of transformation: “Wo Es war, soll Ich werden” (“Where id was, there ego shall be”; *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* 80). It is well known that this imperative has been misunderstood, as if Freud had simply wished to clear up the swamp of drives, to tame wild forces, to “almost substitute” the Id with the Ego. But imposing a form on a force does not necessarily mean taming, in the sense of depriving it of intensity. Lacan rightly criticized the first French translation “le moi doit déloger le ça” (“the ego must dislodge the id”), and the tendency to merge the whole subjectivity in the muted (and solidified) area of the Ego; on the contrary, it is necessary to demolish the deceitful constructions of the more emerging part of the psyche. But how can Freud's statement be translated? How can we side with the part of desire, as desire to be and therefore of non-coincidence? Perhaps by rewriting the same formulation in German with a play on words: “Wo Es war, soll n(Ich)t werden”. Where there was the Id, that is drive, and so the inaugural conflict between rigidity and flexibility, the “non” of non-coincidence must occur, by dominating the impulse towards the undivided (*Seminar V* 205).

12. For Identification, a Synecdoche Suffices

Now we are in a position to be able to consider the access to the Symbolic in all its different modes. Lacan's fallacy can be criticized for two reasons, and that is because he believes: (a) that metaphors work simply as substitutions; (b) that all substitutions are metaphors.

The latter error is even more serious than the former.¹⁹ The fact that there are non-metaphoric substitutions, albeit based on similarity, can be verified immediately in the case of synonyms: but in the relationship between the mother and the father, where the second signifier substitutes the first, it is difficult to detect a nexus based on similarity. The father comes in the

¹⁹ And it must be entirely attributed to Lacan. Jakobson does not make this mistake, even though he creates the condition for it by placing the metaphor on the axis of substitutions.

To Be *and* Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

place of the mother, as Lacan says;²⁰ the Law prohibits a double impulse, it sounds like a double injunction: one addressed to the child "You will not sleep with your mother," the other to the mother: "You will not reabsorb your fruit" (Lacan, *Seminar V* 205). It really is difficult to understand how we can refer to metaphor.

A relationship of metaphorization is, on the contrary, recognizable in the relationship between the boy or girl and the parent of the same sex, who is admired as a model. But this is the mode of the Symbolic which does not concern the law, obedience or uniformity to the law, but rather the formation of the subject in his or her individuality. Evidently, Lacan confused the two sides, not without some good reason insofar as he felt the need to describe access to the Symbolic not only as the interiorization of a code, but as a relationship between subjects. Nevertheless, this confusion has led above all to some disadvantages, because it has become even more difficult for psychoanalysis to focus its attention on the desire to be. The metaphor-substitution represented a tremendous obstacle for the theory of identification. A *confusive* identification could perhaps be described as a substitution: let's think of a subject x who is totally invaded and possessed by *alter*, who thus takes over his place, deprives him of all his subjectivity, as in the mental experiments discussed by Locke, where consideration is given for example to the possibility of transferring the psyche of a prince into the body of a cobbler, thereby cancelling his previous identity.²¹ We would have a substitution, but not a metaphor, if metaphors (at least complex ones) function according to Black's description. Yet, in the *distinctive* identifications, if we wish to consider them processes of metaphorization, things occur very differently: a subject allows himself to be modelled or metaphorized by another subject, but not in an entirely passive way. On the contrary, he absorbs new energies and new perspectives: he is exalted by the emulation, he experiments the possibility of overcoming, and can decide whether to remain faithful to this possibility. This is what *faithfulness to the desire to be* consists of as the desire of the *non*.

So, let's try to consider access to the Symbolic as a horizontal and not a symmetrical relationship between x and *alter*. *Alter* is a model, but is it necessarily a metaphor? Would it be one even if the subject were to interiorize just one trait, *ein einziger Zug*, to go back to Freud's words? If precision is one of our objectives, would it not be more advantageous to define this case as a synecdoche? Let us consider another literary example, the speech addressed by the father to D'Artagnan at the beginning of Dumas' novel:

"You are young. You ought to be brave for two reasons: the first is that you are a Gascon, and the second is that you are my son. Never fear quarrels, but seek adventures . . . to propose an example to you – not mine, for I myself have never appeared at court. . . . I speak of Monsieur de Tréville . . . captain of the Musketeers; that is to say, chief of a legion of Caesars, whom the king holds in great esteem, and whom the cardinal dreads. . . . Still further, Monsieur de Tréville gains ten thousand crowns a year; he is therefore a great noble. He began as you begin. Go to him with this letter, and make your model in order that you may do as he has done." (4)

Here a father addresses his son's desire to be, and his ideal, specifying a model, compared to which the father himself is an imperfect duplicate: a simple model, recognizable in just a few basic characteristics. In order for the emulation to be successful, it must possess just one trait, which the young protagonist has without doubt already inherited from his father: courage. It is a trait that in Gascon is passed down from one generation to the next, and so it

²⁰ "What is the paternal metaphor? Strictly speaking . . . it's the substitution of the father as a symbol or signifier in the place of the mother" (Lacan, *Seminar V* 164).

²¹ See Locke, *Essay on human understanding* (1690), and cf. science fiction films, for example *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.

To Be and Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

corresponds to what, according to Freud, is sufficient for constructing a collective identity, capable of reuniting people who may even differ as far as all the rest is concerned. When the process of identification is set in motion by just one trait (*ein einziger Zug*), it would be more appropriate to speak of synecdoche, and not of metaphor. In all these cases, identification is basically rigid, and the subjects are relatively simple personalities.²²

So, it seems we must not limit ourselves to the metaphor, but use a typology. It should be understood that *each rhetorical mechanism will be defined as a horizontal relationship between (at least) two terms*—and that it will no longer fall back into the substitutive conception. There are four possible minimum combinations: inclusion (synecdoche), intersection (or better still focalizing action: metaphor), proximity (metonymy), contrast/overturning (antithesis, irony, oxymoron). In this way, four figural areas take shape, and the construction of identity, in the Symbolic crossed by the desire to be, can be studied along four main paths. Due to a question of space, I am not able to explain this typology in more detail here, or present the examples confirming it on this occasion.²³ But it would be important to maintain the distinction even just between synecdoche and metaphor.²⁴

13. From the Square of Modalities to the Logic of Correlatives

In section 3, I affirmed that “the” logic does not exist, that is the logic unaccompanied by an adjective that explicitly and honestly declares its style. However, we should not underrate the force of illusion that expresses itself in the definite article: for many centuries, faith or superstition that drive people to believe in just one logic, in monostylism, dominated almost unopposed; the only exception is represented by Heraclitus, whose aphorisms required interpretation. Nonetheless, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the conjunctive logics burst onto the philosophical scene: we must use the plural, because this family of logics was penalized at length due to a lack of clarity. What is the relationship that plays a strategic and decisive role in this family? The contraries or the correlatives? In the first case, there is the possibility of a synthesis, which is lacking in the second because the correlatives, we should never forget, are non-synthesizable opposites. Let's consider two paradigmatic examples: being and nothing, at the beginning of Hegel's logic, and the relationship between master and servant, mentioned by Aristotle in what was the first and fundamental typology of oppositional relationships. In the first case, a synthesis is performed, which generates the becoming, in the second there is no synthesis and neither could there be one.

²² See Freud's example, hysterical schoolgirls (“Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego”).

²³ I explained this conception of figural mechanisms in *Retorica. L'intelligenza figurale nell'arte e nella filosofia*. I take the liberty of referring in particular to the chapter “Retorica del personaggio.”

²⁴ The interactional concept of the metaphor offers new possibilities of interpretation for the *Fort/Da*, that Lacan indicated as a paradigm for the process of symbolization (and metaphorization). In a conference at IRPA (Milan, 23 February 2019), Massimo Recalcati outlined a typology of great interest, which certainly deserves further investigation. Starting from the hypothesis that it is the Father who guarantees the good functioning of the relationship, the fracture between *Fort* and *Da* may be considered pathogenic: on one side, the dominion of the *Da*, the inflated presence of the object (maniacal behavior, the Capitalist Discourse), on the other, the merciless establishment of the *Fort*, in the new forms of melancholy. In the latter case, the subject is nailed to himself as bare existence, lack of sense (lack of that semantization that only the advent of a S2, of a metaphorizing element, could confer). If I have understood Recalcati's observations correctly, I must conclude that the substitution—the *Da* that invades the space of the *Fort*, and vice versa—is a cause of pathologies, wherever the interaction is a state of health (however, neurosis remains to be considered as a partial invasion and “distorted” interaction). In any case, a good theory of the metaphor is also able to throw light on psychic mechanisms.

To Be and Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

Although he often uses correlatives in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and elsewhere, Hegel seems to preserve the primacy of the contraries. His conception, and the oscillations characterizing it, have never been adequately clarified because scholars of Hegelian Dialectic have never been able to understand the polysemy of the opposites, and the conflict between rigid logic and flexible logic. Be that as it may, the path of synthesis is not the only one to have been experimented in the field of conjunctive logics: that of Nietzsche and Heidegger is a logic of the non-synthesizable, and one of Heidegger's key terms, the *Zusammengehörigkeit*, the co-belonging, shows quite clearly the perspective used by the author of *Being and Time*. Nonetheless, as we have already recalled in section 3, Heidegger never knew how to articulate and develop this perspective.

Let us now examine the classical doctrine of modalities and the use made of it by Lacan. Lacan's dissatisfaction with formal logic was manifested on several occasions, and yet it must be admitted that he did not know how to escape the cage of disjunctive logics. His subjection to this logical style is confirmed by his resumption of the square of modalities in *Seminar XX* (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge* 59, 144):

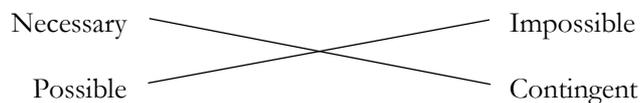


Fig. 4. The square of modalities.

The partiality of this construction consists in recognizing that only two types of relationship are essential and indispensable: that between contradictories and that between contraries (the relationship between subcontraries does not add anything on a conceptual level). Between necessary and contingent, and between impossible and possible, there is a relationship of contradiction, that is of incompatibility (something is necessary or it is contingent). The logical square, in its terministic version, allows for a blending of contraries: white and black can create grey, male and female the androgynous.²⁵ Furthermore, there is no automatism in the genesis of hybrid cases. As far as modal concepts are concerned, the relationship between contraries seems to trace the one between contradictories.²⁶



Fig. 5. The correlatives

words opposites which, although continuing to oppose each other, mutually imply each other? In the separative regime, a contradictory (term or proposition) excludes the simultaneous presence of its opposite (I am sitting down or I am not sitting down); a contrary can exist without implying a constitutive relationship with its stronger alternative (I bought a white car, its existence does not depend on that of black cars). In the case of correlatives, each term is linked to the other: master does not exist without servant, and vice versa. We could visualize it like in fig. 5.

What are the limits of the square of opposition? What is its greatest and most unacceptable flaw? Without doubt, it is the zerostylism: it implicitly decrees the inexistence or marginality of conjunctive relationships, and the impossibility of a non-disjunctive logic. But that which

²⁵ Cf. the use of *carré sémiotique* in Greimas' texts.

²⁶ It is a problem that should be investigated further.

To Be *and* Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

for “the” logic would be considered the most marginal relationship, and the weakest (as opposites do not oppose each other completely, but they imply each other) becomes the beginning and the engine of a conjunctive and flexible logic: the logic of correlatives, of the linked but not synthesizable opposites.

It should be underlined that this logical style does not deny and does not in any way claim to deny—as was stated in the past and as is unwisely repeated even today—the principle of non-contradiction, but only its rigid version. In my book *La ragione flessibile*, I tried to open a space in which the logic of correlatives could finally emerge, without the confusion and opacity, without the uncertainties and inhibitions that have always prevented even the announcement of its foundations. There is still a lot of work to be done, but perhaps this path has finally been opened up. There is a passage in Nietzsche that could be considered “the great announcement” of the correlatives:

Just now my world became perfect, midnight is also noon—
Pain is also a joy, a curse is also a blessing, night is also a sun—go away or else you will learn: a wise man is also a fool.
Have you ever said Yes to one joy? O my friends, then you also said Yes to *all* pain. All things are enchained, entwined, enamored. (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 263)²⁷

It is certainly not surprising that this vision is affirmed by a philosopher who is also an extraordinary writer, in a book that is a perfect hybridization between philosophy and literature. But the implicit logic must become explicit, unless it wants to remain in a sort of limbo: its principles must be clarified – particularly, as we have seen, because the family of conjunctive logics includes different versions including Hegel's mediated synthesis and Deleuze's immediate synthesis (*coincidentia oppositorum*).

The flaws of disjunctive logic do not only concern the strictly logical sphere, but they extend to ontology. How could it be otherwise? Can we believe that a rigid logic is able to describe non-rigid individuals, that a logic of identity-coincidence is able to analyze non-coinciding subjects? Let's go back to Shakespeare's work, aware of the fact that there are different modes of overcoming, and that Hamlet's mode of overcoming is by no means a foregone conclusion. However, we have reached a certainty: *it is not possible to enroll any complex individual in the logical square, if complexity means “overcoming force” and logic of correlatives.*²⁸

14. Lacan's Errors in the Reading of *Hamlet*—The Two Extremes in Shakespeare's Character

According to Lacan, Freud made crucial progress with his interpretation of Hamlet, moving the problem of indecision from an intellectual plane (which had, until then, been preferred, with reference to some of Shakespeare's verses: “Thus conscience does make cowards of us all, /And thus the native hue of resolution /is sickled o'er with the pale cast of thought”; *Hamlet* III.1.82–84), to that of desire. Hamlet cannot take revenge as he identifies himself in the individual who killed his father and married his mother, thus fulfilling his oedipal desires.

²⁷ “Eben ward meine Welt vollkommen, Mitternacht ist auch Mittag, - Schmerz ist auch eine Lust, Flucht ist auch ein Segen, Nacht ist auch eine Sonne, - geht davon oder ihr lernt: ein Weiser ist auch ein Narr. / Sagtet ihr jemals Ja zu Einer Lust? Oh, meine Freunde, so sagtet ihr Ja auch zu *allem* Wehe. Alle Dinge sind verkettet, verfädel, verliebt” (Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra* 402).

²⁸ To avoid any misunderstanding: the following propositions may be included in the square, “all individuals are complex,” “no individual is complex,” “some individuals are complex,” “some individuals are not complex.” However, it is not possible to introduce *the relationships that give rise to the complexity*.

To Be and Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

A strong point in Freud's reading consists in having observed how Hamlet is anything but incapable of action in general: "We see him doing so on two occasions: first in a sudden outburst of temper, when he runs his swords through the eavesdropper behind the arras, and secondly in a premeditated and even crafty fashion, when, with all the callousness of a Renaissance prince, he sends the two courtiers to the death that had been planned for himself" (Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* 367). Therefore, the reason that caused the paralysis must be sought in desire. According to Lacan, however, it must be sought not only in Hamlet's desire for his mother, but even more so in the desire *of* the mother (subjective genitive), in other words, in the fact that the queen seems to be dominated by an unbridled lust (Lacan, *Le séminaire VI* 339). Indeed, so unbridled is her lust that she is unable to distinguish between the objects of her sexual appetite: this is what the prince reproaches Gertrude for, placing under her gaze, in the *closet scene*, two miniatures depicting the old king and Claudius. The idealized description of the father is contrasted with the repugnant semblance of the second husband. Gertrude's indifference towards the objects of her desire is inconceivable for Hamlet:

Sense sure you have,
Else could you not have motion, but sure that sense
Is apoplexed, for madness would not err,
Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thrilled,
But it reserved some quantity of choice
To serve in such a difference. (III.4.71–76)

Why should this ungovernable and rather indiscriminate lust prevent Hamlet from killing Claudius? (If anything, it justifies the *ghost's* concern regarding an act of violence that Hamlet may be tempted to commit against his mother). It seems that, for Lacan, the protagonist's incapacity to act reflects his mother's inability to choose: an explanation that leaves us somewhat doubtful. No less disconcerting is the explanation of the reason why Hamlet has lost the path of desire: this supposedly derives from his voluntary renunciation of Ophelia.²⁹ Being deprived of any object, his desire has been sucked into the orbit of maternal desire.

Therefore, it is only the reconstruction of the object that renders the impossible act possible, and this occurs, according to Lacan, in the scene of Ophelia's funeral, and more specifically when Hamlet jumps into the grave where Laertes has descended to embrace his sister for the last time. What is the motive for this gesture? Later on, Hamlet will explain the reason to Horatio, stating that it was "the bravery of his grief" (V.2.79) that aroused his anger. In any case, for Lacan "this is the moment that generates in Hamlet what allows him to recover his desire";³⁰ and also his identity, because before jumping into the grave, he proclaims: "This is I, Hamlet the Dane" (V.1.224).

This thesis does not appear to be very convincing insofar as Hamlet continues not to act: in fact, in the final scene, he first puts himself at the service of Claudius; and will manage to kill the king only when he discovers that he has been mortally wounded. In other words, the protagonist continues to exist in the time of procrastination.

Shortly, we will examine other claims made by Lacan that are even weaker and more unfounded than those mentioned until now; however, more than the errors, it is the partiality of the perspective that must be underlined and rejected. Who is Hamlet for Lacan? As much as he wants to distance himself from the traditional interpretations, and also that of Freud, for Lacan Hamlet remains a paralyzed subject. A falterer, a neurotic (even though Lacan is

²⁹ "[I]l n'a plus de désir – Ophélie a été rejetée" (Lacan, *Le séminaire VI* 339).

³⁰ "[C]'est là le moment où ce produit dans Hamlet ce qui lui permet de ressaisir son désir" (Lacan, *Le Séminaire VI* 342).

To Be *and* Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

cautious about using clinical labels). The hero of deferment: “our Hamlet procrastinates and procrastinates throughout the play, thus making it the work of procrastination par excellence”.³¹ As can be seen, we are perfectly in line with tradition. This is why Lacan's reading, which remains subordinated to Oedipus, is so disappointing.

This point must be clarified. As we have already said, the primacy of the desire to have does not imply that the desire to be is completely absent, but rather that it does not manifest itself unless it is in subordinate forms. Incorporating “the phallus” into Shakespeare's most famous line (Lacan, *Le Séminaire VI* 258) does not take us any further than Oedipus and the Symbolic crushed on the Law. According to Lacanian doctrine, desire (on the part of the boy) to be the phallus of the mother is a response to the cannibalistic desire attributed to the maternal other. In conclusion, it is in the mother's desire to have that the root of the child's desire to be is found. The function of the father consists in prohibiting both desires.

Here is the great limitation of this approach: *for Lacan, the desire to be is never creative*. The paths of identification are fundamentally reduced to the desire to be the phallus (and so an imaginary, confusive identification) and to the desire to be the parent of the same sex, along a metaphoric-substitutive path, that is reduced, in turn, to a synecdoche (introjection of the Ego Ideal, limited to oedipal relationships). The Symbolic being Law acts only as castration.

However, we have seen that there are two modes of culture: rules and texts (Lotman), that is the rules to be obeyed, incarnated in rigid individuals, in stereotypes, and the models to be emulated and interpreted, that present themselves in the form of fascinating singularities. When the subject has to enter the Great Other, he faces two possibilities: imitation and interpretation. In the eyes of D'Artagnan, who exemplifies the first possibility, the Symbolic is a “full” and compact space, saturated with sense, in which all the answers to all the questions that the subject happens to pose can be found. But for Hamlet, right from the beginning, the Symbolic is “out of joint,” it is off its hinges, displaced from those rigid foundations that limit its positions, its possibilities.

Perhaps not even one of Lacan's affirmations is able to withstand close examination. And that which is least able to stand up to such scrutiny is the one according to which “Hamlet knows that he is guilty of being. Being is unbearable to him. Before any start of the drama, he knows the crime of being.”³² Therefore, Hamlet is a character of melancholy: self-reproach driven to the guilt of being. Almost as if Silenus' sentence, “it is best not to have been born at all,” had caught up with him prematurely—had reverberated in his mind with a strength unweakened by the passing of the centuries.

Lacan is wrong. Hamlet's problem is not the senselessness of being, but the desire not to be condemned simply to one role, that of the avenger. To assume this role, as Harold Bloom noted, any Fortinbras or any Laertes would suffice (4). Hamlet does not resign himself to playing a codified part, and his extraordinary life force, his aspiration to singularity emerge in this refusal.

This does not mean that he is unable to feel nostalgia for a simple identity, one of those that pass before his eyes, for example that of Fortinbras, who is so sure of himself and of his actions – at least outwardly, because his aspirations to reconquer the land lost by his father fade away with an unexpected and rather inglorious rapidity, to the point that we see him ask for permission to cross a kingdom that should have been the object of conquest (IV.4.1–4). It would be stretching a point to say that we can glimpse a trait of comic foolishness in the ardour with which he prepares to fight with his soldiers “for a plot / Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause, / Which is not tomb enough and continent / To hide the slain” (IV.4.62–65)?

³¹ “[N]otre Hamlet procrastine, et tout au long de la pièce, ce qui en fait par excellence la pièce de la procrastination” (Lacan, *Le Séminaire VI* 293).

³² “Lui, Hamlet, sait qu'il est coupable d'être. Il lui est insupportable d'être. Avant tout commencement du drame, il connaît le crime d'exister” (Lacan, *Le Séminaire VI* 293).

To Be and Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

Is Hamlet's admiration truly genuine? Must we believe him when he affirms that "Rightly to be great / Is not to stir without great argument, / But greatly to find quarrel in a straw / When honour's at the stake" (IV.4.53–56)? He concludes his monologue by saying to himself: "O, from this time forth, / My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth" (IV.4.65–66). The fact remains that he will continue to postpone the revenge. His noble reflections are only "Words, words, words."

As far as Laertes is concerned, who for Lacan (and other scholars) is an ideal figure in Hamlet's eyes,³³ we should not overlook the involuntary comedy that seeps into his image, and which emerges even in the paroxysm of the pain, that is so hyperbolic and stereotyped that Hamlet cannot help but mock him: "Woo't weep, woo't fight, woo't fast, woo't tear thyself? / Woo't drink up eisel, eat a crocodile? / I'll do't" (V.1.242–44). And isn't there something involuntarily ridiculous in the unrelenting desire to revenge a father, when the father is nothing but an imbecile? This is how Hamlet judged Polonius: "Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell" (III.4.31). Avenging a father is a possible gesture, before being an obligation, for a simple, undivided subject, who coincides with himself; if in this work it becomes an impossible action, it is because *Hamlet is an overcoming identity*.

What Lacan says about Hamlet not having any more desires is untrue. Rather, he really is released from the desire to have, and he exists mainly in the desire to be – which is not the desire of completeness, but of non-coincidence. How does Hamlet put his desire of "non" to the test? Unlike the leading characters of some modern novels, such as Julien Sorel and Raskol'nikov, he does not have a model to emulate and interpret, though he is not lacking in anti-models, such as Fortinbras and Laertes. And the father? If Hamlet hesitates to obey his commands, is it because of the unclear accusations that the ghost addresses to itself? "I am thy father's spirit, / Doomed for a certain term to walk the night, / And for the day confined to fast in fires, / Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature / Are burnt and purged away" (I.5.9–13). *Foul crimes*: whatever they are, they do not exhort Hamlet to assume his father's identity. In the language of Lacan, the *A* of the Great Other is barred, highlighting the lack of signifier for the subject.

But the bar on the Symbolic, as we said, indicates (or should indicate) much more than a lack of something or an incompleteness. Characters such as D'Artagnan find in the completeness of the Symbolic a signifier that can model their future (the father, and Monsieur de Tréville); Hamlet perceives a lack in the Great Other. Is it just a lack? A void that fuels his desire to create a singular identity for himself, beyond the role in which the *ghost* wishes to imprison him? The Great Other is barred because it is divided, in the conflictual plurality of the styles and of logics. There is not only the lack—the presumed secret of psychoanalysis, according to Lacan—,³⁴ but rather what psychoanalysis has not understood: *the modes of the desire to be, and the polemos between coincidence and non-coincidence*.

It is not true, as Lacan says, that Hamlet is unable to work through his bereavement until the scene of Ophelia's funeral: he works through it continuously and creatively in a process in which he crosses other identities, starting from his refusal to be a simple avenger. He overcomes the models that present themselves before him, the father, but also Fortinbras and Laertes, and the actor who acts out Claudius' crime. One of these identities is the Ego of the past, Ophelia's beloved. The Ego of the desire to have shatters, Hamlet regresses as far as the

³³ "Pour Hamlet, celui-ci est une sorte de semblable ou de double plus beau que lui-même"; "Hamlet . . . trouve un rival à sa taille dans ce semblable remodelé" ("For Hamlet, Laertes is a sort of similar being or a double, who more handsome than he is"; "Hamlet . . . finds a rival for his own stature in that remodelled double"; Lacan, *Le Séminaire VI* 394).

³⁴ "C'est, si je puis dire, le grand secret de la psychanalyse. Le grand secret, c'est – il n'y a pas d'Autre de l'Autre" ("If we can say this, this is the great secret of psychoanalysis. The great secret is that there is no Other of the Other"; Lacan, *Le Séminaire VI* 353).

To Be and Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

condition of a *corps morcelé* in the scene, mentioned in section 6, in which he disintegrates in the eyes of his beloved maiden. He returns to the condition of an *x* who does not recognize himself within his own boundaries, and who has to overcome them. Hamlet's path is that of the tragic hero, that is of a double movement towards the extremes.

The traditional interpretations, to which those of Freud and Lacan also belong, despite their originality, contemplated only one of the extremes: the mysterious paralysis of the will, the time of procrastination, in an indecisive, neurotic and helpless subject, for whom it seems that his time, the time for revenge, never comes. Hamlet's creativity—the desire to be, the desire not to confine himself to one role, the time of interpretation, of invention—has been neglected. When he rewrites the actors' *pièce*, the prince experiences himself as an artist. But he is constantly an artist, a tight-rope walker on the wire of language: for this purpose, he puts on the mask of the *fool*.

I will try to summarize the double movement towards the extremes, resuming the diagram of the tragic hero, of the character who goes beyond averageness without having a reference model: see fig. 6.

The two extremes are reciprocally linked: like all the great characters of literature, Hamlet is conflictual, but also comprised of conflict. In the area of averageness we must place the *revenge tragedy*, the plot that Hamlet refuses to perform, experiencing guilt for this refusal. Inventing oneself is not a simple task, and overcoming is not a leap “outside rigidity”: this outside does not exist.³⁵

15. A Parricide?

Nor could this outside exist in the field of research. All the criticisms that I have levelled at Lacan presuppose the exceptional progress that he allowed to be made, not only in psychoanalysis, but in the philosophy of the modal revolution. There is no need to underline the

³⁵ Readers who expected a deeper analysis of *Hamlet* will probably be disappointed. However, for obvious reasons of space, I had to limit myself to dealing with the fundamental problem. This does not exclude the possibility of further studies in the future.

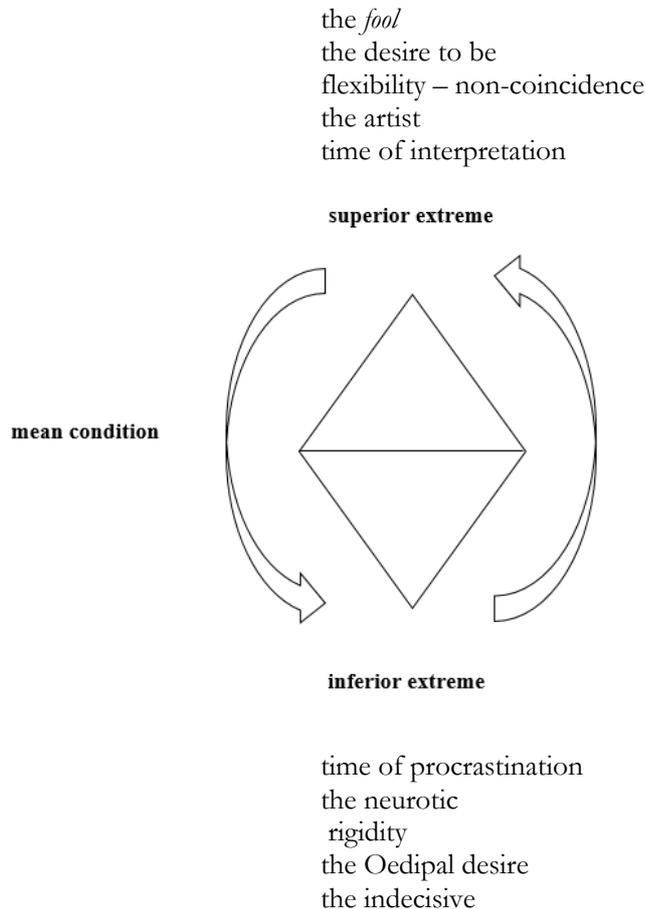


Fig. 6. Hamlet's identity.

To Be and Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

importance of the theory of registers as an acquisition; however, the investigation into the modes must be pushed beyond rigidity that the Lacanian school has emphasized, instead of questioning.

Killing a father may be an act that favours his resurrection, as Freud demonstrated in *Totem and Taboo*. And such a resurrection may take place in the Symbolic, understood in its vaster meaning, as the register of a creative sublimation, of an inheritance to be interpreted.

16. Works Cited

- Aristotle. *On Rhetoric*. Translated by George A. Kennedy, Oxford UP, 1991.
- Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. 1946. Translated by Willard R. Trask. Princeton UP, 1953.
- Black, Max. "Metaphor." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 55, 1954, pp. 273–94.
- Blanchot, Maurice. *The infinite conversation*. 1974. Translated by Susan Hanson, U of Minnesota P, 1993.
- . "Literature and the right to death." 1948. *The Work of Fire*, translated by Lydia Davis, Stanford UP, 1995, pp. 300–44.
- Bloom, Harold. Introduction. *Hamlet*, by William Shakespeare, edited by Harold Bloom. Chelsea House Publishers, 1990, pp. xi–xviii.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. *Seven Nights*. Translated by E. Weinberger, New Directions, 2009.
- . *The Total Library: Non-fiction, 1922-1986*. Translated by E. Allen, S. Jill Levine, E. Weinberger, edited by E. Weinberger, Penguin, 2000.
- Bottirolì, Giovanni. *Che cos'è la teoria della letteratura. Fondamenti e problemi*. Einaudi, 2006.
- . "Liberatore e incatenato: le aporie di Dioniso (e del dionisiaco) da Euripide a Nietzsche". *Enthymema*, n. 14, 2016, pp. 51-81.
- . *La ragione flessibile. Modi d'essere e stili di pensiero*. Bollati Boringhieri, 2013.
- . *Retorica. L'intelligenza figurale nell'arte e nella filosofia*. Bollati Boringhieri, 1991.
- . "What is alive and what is dead in Jakobson. From codes to styles". *Roman Jakobson, linguistica e poetica*, a cura di Edoardo Esposito, Stefania Sini e Marina Castagneto, Ledizioni, 2018, pp. 213-20.
- Dumas, Alexandre. *The Three Musketeers*. 1844. Translated by Richard Pevear, Viking Penguin, 2006.
- Euripides, *Medea*. Translated by Augusta Webster, Macmillan and Co., 1868.
- Faulkner, William. *Sartoris*. 1929. New American Library, 1983.
- Flaubert, Gustave. *Madame Bovary*. 1857. Edited by Claudine Gothot-Mersch, Garnier, 1990.
- . *Madame Bovary*. 1857. Translated by Alan Russell, Penguin Classics, 1950.
- Freud, Sigmund. "A Difficulty in the Path of Psychoanalysis." 1917. Translated by James Strachey, Standard Edition, vol. 17, Hogarth, 1955, pp. 135–44.
- . "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego." 1921. Translated by James Strachey, Standard Edition, vol. 18, Hogarth, 1955, pp. 65–144.

To Be and Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

- . "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes." 1915. Translated by James Strachey, Standard Edition, vol. 14, Hogarth, 1957, pp. 109–40.
- . *The Interpretation of Dreams (First Part)*. 1899. Translated by James Strachey, Standard Edition, vol. 4, Hogarth, 1953.
- . "Mourning and Melancholia." 1917. Translated by James Strachey, Standard Edition, vol. 14, Hogarth, 1957, pp. 237–58.
- . *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. 1931. Translated by James Strachey, Standard Edition, vol. 22, Hogarth, 1964.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and time*. 1927. Translated by Joan Stambaugh, State U of New York P, 2010.
- . *Introduction to Metaphysics*. 1935. Translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, Yale UP, 2000.
- . "What is Metaphysics?" 1929. *Pathmarks*. Translated by William McNeill, Cambridge UP, 1998, pp. 82–96.
- Jakobson, Roman. "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances." 1956. *Language in Literature*, edited by Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy, Harvard UP, 1987, pp. 95-114.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. 1781-87. Translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge UP, 1998.
- Lacan, Jacques. "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis." 1953. *Écrits (the First complete edition in english)*, translated by Bruce Fink in collaboration with Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg, Norton & Company, 2006, pp. 197–268.
- . *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Psychoses (1955-56)*. Translated by Russell Grigg, book III, Norton, 1993.
- . *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Formations of the Unconscious (1957-58)*. Translated by Russell Grigg, book V, Polity, 2017.
- . *Le séminaire. Livre VI. Le désir et son interprétation (1958-59)*, Editions de la Martinière et Le Champ Freudien Editeur, 2013.
- . *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge (Encore) (1972-73)*. Translated by Bruce Fink, book XX, Norton, 1998.
- Locke, John. *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*. 1690. Edited by Roger Woolhouse, Penguin Books, 1997.
- Lotman, Ju. M. *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. Translated by Ann Shukman, Tauris, 2001.
- Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. 1848. Edited by Frederic L. Bender, Norton, 1988. Norton Critical Editions.
- Miller, Jacques-Alain. "Pièces détachées." *La cause freudienne*, nos. 60-61, 2005/2-3, pp. 151–72 and 129–53.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Also sprach Zarathustra*. 1883-85. Kritische Studienausgabe. Herausgegeben von Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari. De Gruyter, 1999.
- . *Beyond good and evil*. 1887. Edited by Adrian Del Caro. Stanford UP, 2014.

To Be *and* Not to Be: Hamlet's Identity

Giovanni Bottirolì

- . *The Birth of Tragedy*. 1872. Translated by Douglas Smith, Oxford UP, 2000.
- . *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. 1883-85. Edited and translated by Adrian Del Caro and Robert B. Pippin. Cambridge UP, 2006.
- . *Twilight of the Idols*. 1888. Translated by Duncan Large. Oxford UP, 2008.
- Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Translated by Horace Gregory, Signet, 2001.
- Proust, Marcel. *À la recherche du temps perdu*. 1913-27. Edited by Pierre Clarac and André Ferré, Gallimard, 1954.
- . "In the shadow of young girls in flower." *In Search of Lost Time*, translated by Scott Moncrieff, edited and annotated by William C. Carter, vol. 2, Yale UP, 2013.
- Recalcati, Massimo. *Il complesso di Telemaco*. Feltrinelli, 2013.
- . *Cosa resta del padre? La paternità nell'epoca ipermoderna*. Cortina, 2011.
- . *Jacques Lacan. Desiderio, godimento e soggettivazione*. Cortina, 2012.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. 1916. Translated by Wade Baskin. McGraw-Hill, 1966.
- Sophocles. *Oedipus the King. Oedipus at Colonus. Antigone*. Translated by Francis Storr. Heinemann, 1962.