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Reading Hamlet: Psychoanalytic and Otherwise:

'Plucking out the Heart of his Mystery'

By

Jeannine Jameson

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The thesis that follows argues for a different critical reading of Hamlet from the psychoanalytic point of view. Psychoanalytic critics have devised and shaped their interpretations and criticism of William Shakespeare's Hamlet. These interpretations and readings of the play are woven and mimetic of one another. In my approach to Hamlet I will address these interpretations in the theoretical framework of the theories of Jacques Lacan, Sigmund Freud, René Girard, and T.S. Eliot. By exploring the psychological problems of Hamlet, I intend to dissect Hamlet's true inner drives and desires, devising my own critical reading of the play.

For over half a century, critics like Ernest Jones have attacked the approach of A.C. Bradley who, in Shakespearean Tragedy said that Shakespeare's characters were like real people. They attempted "to realize fully and exactly the inner movement which produced these words and no other, deeds and no other particular moment" (Bradley 2). My argument is a
similar one. William Shakespeare created some of the most interesting and complex psychological profiles in the history of all literature and it is highly intriguing to study them in depth, specifically the psyche of Hamlet. The heart of his mystery is ambiguous, to say the least.

Hamlet’s first line in the play, “A little more than kin and less than kind,” illustrates the relationship between Shakespearean tragedy and psychoanalytic theory. Hamlet is “more than kin”, meaning that he is more than a passive subject for psychoanalysis and is therefore “less than kind” as he is a broad and complex subject. It is challenging to define him in simple terms. Hamlet is both an object in psychoanalysis and an object that causes psychoanalysis to occur. A great example of psychoanalysis occurs when we link psychological theory with literary criticism. This is especially apparent in the case of comparing Hamlet with Oedipus, as Ernest Jones does in his famous book *Hamlet and Oedipus*.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. In chapter one, I will analyze Hamlet’s desire, specifically as it relates to his object of desire. I will use Lacan’s theory to explore the constitution of Hamlet’s desire, specifically the object of desire as it is related to the Other: Gertrude, Ophelia and King Hamlet. Chapter two argues that Hamlet’s inaction is caused by multiple psychological problems. His tragic flaw lies in his inability to act. By contesting Freud’s ideas of the Oedipal complex, I posit other psychic states in
Hamlet that lead to his inaction. Chapter three suggests that Hamlet’s madness is feigned. It is my belief that Hamlet’s madness is feigned out of self-defense and is caused by his shifting desire. Closely intertwined with the madness of Hamlet is mimesis and mimetic desire. I believe the character of Hamlet demonstrates mimetic desire and the concept of mimesis the most out of all of William Shakespeare’s plays. Hamlet’s mimetic desire for his father and then his uncle, turns about, returning to Hamlet’s desire and direction of desire. A further example of mimesis is the parallel between Hamlet, Shakespeare’s own life, and the play within the play, The Mousetrap. Chapter four offers a new critical reading of Hamlet focusing on T.S. Eliot’s criticism of the play. For Eliot, the ‘madness’ of Hamlet is in Shakespeare’s control. “For Shakespeare it is less than madness and more than feigned” (Eliot 790).
Chapter One

Lacan and Enigmatic Desire

The direction of Hamlet's desire has been and continues to be of great debate among scholars. In my reading, Hamlet's desire is shifting because of his confused state of mind. He is easily influenced by the world around him, his mother and father, and Ophelia. Hamlet emerges as the symbolic drama of the object in desire. I argue that Hamlet's desire is motivated and created by the desire of the other. Because of this, there is no room for his own desire to exist. Therefore, his desire remains shifting and displaced.

One way to approach Hamlet's ambiguous drive is via Lacanian theory. By applying Lacan's theory of the object of desire to decode Hamlet's desire, I try to expose the reasons behind his shifting desire. In reading Lacan's criticism of Hamlet, I will examine the notions of the phallus, the Oedipus complex, death drive, and the symbolic order as they relate to the concept of desire. 1

The concept of desire is at the center of psychoanalytic theory and practice. Lacan states that Hamlet is the tragedy of desire and that is "why we are in the midst of clinical experience." The structural analysis of the play
orders not only the characters’ positions, but also the sequence of events that lead us to “situate the meaning and direction of desire.”

*Desire* for Lacan was initially shaped by inter-subjectivity. In “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis”, he characterizes desire as the desire for recognition and the end of analysis as the recognition of desire. Lacan reformulates his ideas about Hamlet’s desire in Seminar VI, “Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet.” He states that the object of desire as the object in desire is not separate from, but constituted by desire. Hamlet’s desire for his mother, Ophelia, and the confusion in what he desires is the key to exploring his troubled psyche. Furthermore, Hamlet desires Ophelia, but only fully through death. He desires to be like his father for he sees himself in his father. This mimetic desire to be like his father creates his desire for the same woman, Gertrude.

Hamlet subjects himself to the other. This is one possible reason for his shifting desire. Because he defines himself in the other, first with his mother and father, and then with Ophelia, he sees their desire as his own desire. Lacan’s essay, “The Mirror Stage as the Formative of the Function of the ‘I’”, distinguishes the relationship between the self and the other. A transformation occurs in Hamlet when he takes on the image of the other, which in symbolic terms, is his dead father, the ghost. “Man projects himself with the phantoms that dominate him” (Lacan 2). In other words, Hamlet projects the desire of
the ghost as his own. This goes beyond the theme of revenge, for Hamlet
denies his love for Ophelia, as his desire has now shifted to the ghost’s desire,
and he battles with the constant struggle between the two. Moreover, his
desire for the other and of the other’s desire turns into the desire for the self.

Lacan associates his theory of need, demand and desire with Hamlet’s
problems of his absent mother. “It is insofar as the mother, site of the demand
for love, is initially symbolized in the double register of presence and absence,
that she is in a position to initiate the dialectic; she turns what the subject is
really deprived of, the breast for example, into a symbol of love” (Ornicar 39).
Thus, a disturbing aspect of the mother emerges. Lacan believes that Hamlet’s
alienation is due to his desire for his mother. The mother is the woman who
desires a husband and who desires any man. She turns her desire into a law
and affirms it immodestly. Hamlet remains speechless when the queen
opposes a calm refusal to his disapproval. She does not recognize the value
that he offers her in order to justify the sacrifice of her jouissance. She does
not embody desire but instead, an excessive appetite. I believe that through her
what is justified is the horror of femininity or the ‘grotesque’. The
displacement of Hamlet’s desire consequently falls as a curse on Ophelia,
whom he rejects because of the underlying struggle in his psyche. I presume
that Gertrude in Hamlet functions not only as the Oedipal (Other) object, but as
the other of demand, whose excessive enjoyment gets in the way of traditional
dialectic of desire. In turn, Hamlet is dependent on the desire of the other, the m-other.

The distinction between need, demand, and desire is directly related to the imaginary order. "Desire is an effect in the subject of that condition, which is imposed upon him by the existence of the discourse to cause his need to pass through the defiles of the signifier" (Lacan 36). Desire refers to the libido, pleasure principle and wish fulfillment. It is born from the split between need and demand. It is irreducible to need because it is not in relation to a real object but related to fantasy. It is also irreducible to demand because it seeks to impose itself without taking language or unconscious of the 'other' into account. "Therefore demand is for something whether it is desired or not, whereas desire is absolute." ² What is imposed upon Hamlet is the other's desire.

In Lacanian theory I believe there is a shifting of the object, seen as the object of desire, the object in desire and the object as cause of desire. Desire, for Lacan, almost always refers back to the other. I believe Lacanian theory insists that the object of desire is always, rather, an object in desire constituted by, rather than anterior to, the displacement of representation. I also contest that Hamlet’s desire is found outside of himself in the other, rather than a mere primal drive from himself. Therefore, his desire is not only shifting, but also displaced.
Yet, the issue of Hamlet’s desire remains ambiguous. His desire is displaced and misguided, and hence, he is a very indecisive fellow. Because both Hamlet’s father and uncle desire Gertrude, Hamlet desires her too. The son seeks to take the father’s place everywhere, and to assume his desires. Hamlet cannot decide what he wants because his desire is decided for him rather than a result of his own choice. My idea is related to the theory of the *symbolic order* (Girard 181). The need is the mother’s need for a husband. Hamlet’s demand is for a father and the ‘perfect’ mother. The Lacanian return to Freud aimed to reveal the symbolic beneath the imaginary (or the real beneath the symbolic), and to express the ‘intertwining’ between the three orders. The other is the object of desire whereas the Other (capitalized) is not a physical object at all but the source of the meaning in terms of the symbolic order. I believe that the ‘other’ is Ophelia, and the ‘Other’ is Gertrude, because that is where Hamlet’s source of meaning comes from, psychologically. As related to the symbolic and imaginary order, his desire turns inward in himself and is narcissistically displaced.

For Hamlet, his desire is always symbolic. He feels himself to be in the imaginary situation of the other. His object of desire is only in his intent and it is never fully realized. The object of his desire becomes an imaginary object and is symbolically deprived. For Hamlet to fulfill his own desire, he must kill his own desire and therefore kill himself. However bizarre this may seem, the
subject is always part of the fantasy of the imaginary order. The tragedy of his desire lies in the fact that it remains symbolic and therefore, it can never fully be attained. To repeat Lacan, the very structure at the basis of desire always lends a note of impossibility. “The object of desire becomes the signifier of this impossibility” (Lacan 36).

Ophelia is an object of desire to Hamlet. Symbolically, in her death she gives Hamlet “access” to castration through his mourning for her. In Acts II and III, Hamlet rejects her because of his overbearing mother, whom he tries so hard to please by obeying her. In doing so, Ophelia embodies the true objet d’une jouissance. I believe that through her death, she is once again an object of desire. For example, the graveyard scene takes us to a conflict (between Yorik and Hamlet) in the bottom of her grave, and she is “won back” with mourning and death as the price to pay. Therefore, Ophelia as the object of desire is a dead object. Because she is once again an impossible object, she can become the object of his desire again. Only in her death can he fully desire her. Her grave becomes the only bed where Hamlet can express his desire. “The obsessional neurotic sets everything up so that the object of his desire becomes the signifier of his impossibility” (Lacan 36). This masculine desire of Hamlet is similar to Romeo’s desire for Juliet, the beautiful dead woman in Romeo and Juliet, and has been used by writers as far back as Petrarch. This suggests that sexuality can only be safely engaged in death. Desire kills the female object
literally and also kills Hamlet symbolically as the subject, who mourns and suffers the loss. Hamlet speaks of his own death as “a consummation/ Devoutly to be wish’d.” He links his own death with sexual intercourse, imagining both as the perfection of his desire. The object of desire becomes the subject’s own death. The object in desire is illustrated in his mourning. Ophelia is representative of the unattainable symbolic desire of the other, in relation to the symbolic order. Hamlet rejects the desire of the other.

The death of Ophelia prompts Lacan’s question, “What is the connection between mourning and the constitution of the object in desire?” (Lacan 36) In this sense, Ophelia, as the object, must be won back as the object of desire. In order for this to happen she must be killed and mourned. This is a process that Lacan describes as the mobilization of the imaginary and symbolic orders in relation to the “hole in the real.” The death of Ophelia is a ritual sacrifice in reparation for Hamlet’s repressed mourning for his father’s death. Therefore, I believe that Hamlet’s failure to obtain the desire of the other (Ophelia) results in his desire to kill himself. Hamlet’s death drive is caused by his displaced unconscious desire of the other. This psychological displacement of desire turns itself into the narcissistic death of his own desire. Psychologically, the desire of the other takes over, and there is no room left for his own desire to exist. In his mind, it must be killed. Although this appears to
happen at a symbolic level, Hamlet fulfills his death drive by the end of the play. Hamlet’s death is linked with the narcissistic death of his own desire.

Ophelia embodies the drama of the feminine object caught up in the meshes of masculine desire. Likewise, she is at the same time the object and the touchstone of desire. She is both the object of desire and an object of the phallus. It is worthy noting that there is a pun here in her name O-Phelia, meaning O or of the phallus. Ophelia is “exteriorized and rejected by the subject as a symbol signifying life... the bearer of that vital swelling that he curses and wishes had dried up forever” (Lacan 23). When Hamlet says “I did love you once”, we see the mourning of both the object as Ophelia, and the phallus. Man is “not without having it” and woman “is without having it.” The object of desire has only one signifier, the phallus and it appears in spurts where death is at the rendez-vous (Felman 48).

Hamlet’s relationship with Ophelia becomes one of estrangement and displacement. After he sees the ghost, she notices his change in attitude towards her (II,i). This is important because it marks the beginning of his loss of her as a love object. His cruel treatment towards her illustrates the destruction and loss of her as an object of desire. The desire of the other, of the ghost, his dead father who represents the phallus, takes over.

In Lacan’s reading of Hamlet, the son must pay dearly for the fault of the father whom he honors. Surely, the father is seduced by his wife’s lies and
she does not hesitate to sacrifice him to her sexuality. Hamlet’s father is killed by her as much as by her rival lover, Claudius. I presume he is betrayed at the moment when he gives in to temptation and dies because he has given in to desire and to the benefit of the desire of the other. Hence, Hamlet is the tragedy of impossible desire to exist as desire, and is only realized in the death of his desire.

“The death desire is the desire not to wake up to the message: through the death of his father, he is henceforth confronted with his own death” (Gallop 177). In Ecrits, Lacan asserts that the oedipal myth is a “lure” or “imaginary fixation.” There is not only the oedipal desire for the father’s death but an even radical death drive or “death desire.” Through the death of his father, Hamlet is confronted with his own death.

Hamlet’s problem and cause of displaced desire is partly due to Gertrude. Lacan emphasizes Hamlet’s subjection to the desire of his mother. Hamlet is “too much in the mother.” While critics like Jan Kott, and Graham Bradshaw seem to be interested in the origin of Hamlet’s desire and internalized problems, Lacan says traces it to his mother’s desire. ³ Hamlet is not delayed by his own desire, but by an insecurity as to what his mother desires. I believe Gertrude turns Hamlet’s desire into demand and therefore leaves no room for his own desire (his own “O”), to exist. Hamlet’s flesh is “too too sullied”
because his mother’s flesh appears “too too solid,” barred through symbolic castration (I.ii.129).

Hamlet’s confusion and conflict between his desire for Ophelia and his desire for his mother plays a large part in Hamlet’s subsequent madness, the mixing of demands and the object in desire. In Act IV scene v. Ophelia demands an audience with Gertrude, not Claudius. Although the two women are separated by Hamlet, it is Gertrude who confabulates Ophelia’s drowning, which brings the women together once again. Gertrude says “Sweets for the sweet” at her grave, and this lines signifies that there is some sort of doubling and link between these two, as the object and other, in the scene of Hamlet’s desire (IV. vii). Finally, both women are linked in their death. Ophelia’s garments are “heavy with their drink” and Gertrude dies from drinking poison, her last words being “No, no, the drink, the drink- O my dear Hamlet...” Both women die “Heavy with drink” (V.ii.). The linking of both women together is another way we can see how their desire for Hamlet and his for them are mixed and confused.

Hamlet’s displacement rests primarily on Ophelia, whom he rejects as a representative of rejecting women he believes to be are evil because of what he thinks his mother has done. When Hamlet tells Ophelia,
Get thee to a nunnery - Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me. I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offenses at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves all, believe none of us. Go thy way to a nunnery. Where's your father?

(III.i.119-126)

He literally means for her to go to a whorehouse, where he believes she belongs. His anger stems from his mother’s actions, and not Ophelia’s.

Ophelia feels the displacement of his anger. His anger spills over against Ophelia as we can see in this speech, from his rage against his mother. She is the one who truly goes mad in her grief and commits suicide. Even though his anger is verbal, Ophelia’s death is symbolically caused by Hamlet’s rage.

In the above speech, Hamlet makes clear his feelings that Ophelia is only concerned with contaminating him and not others. Furthermore, he is trapped within his own oedipal conflict. He identifies with being a ‘whore’, because he is unable to carry out revenge on his father’s death. This is illustrated when he says, “Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,/ And fall a-cursing, like a very drab,/ A stallion” (II.ii.).

In “Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet”, Lacan referred to Freud’s Der Untergang des Oedipus Komplexes (1924), where Freud indicates that the aim of the Oedipus complex is not to kill the father or violate
the mother. Instead, the point is that this “complex” becomes a structuring of desire around a fundamental fantasy rather than a “complex” formed by repressed instincts. I will discuss Freud’s oedipal theory further in chapter two, in relation to Hamlet’s inability to act.

In his account of Hamlet’s dream, Lacan separates the dream into two elements, the figure of a dead father returned as a ghost and a ‘sentence.’ The first element is an image full of emotion and the other is a linguistic structure whose subject is the third-person masculine singular pronoun. These elements are not equal. As much as we are intrigued by ghosts and dead fathers, the image of Hamlet is a distraction from the grammatical point of the sentence. This clouds the reader’s interpretation. It also draws attention back to the ghost and the phallus.

With the analysis of Hamlet in *Le Desir et son interpretation*, Lacan altered his position by putting more emphasis on castration, including the father’s castration. Previously, there was discrepancy between what Lacan wrote about the phallus and his castration theory. The theory concerns the phallus, the myth of patriarchal culture and the name of the father. Hamlet is not defined by his father, but by his father’s name, ‘the name of the father’. He is not defined by his real father, but by an imaginary or symbolic one. His father is represented as such by becoming a ghost, a figure that exists only in his imagination.
Ophelia becomes a symbol of the phallus. First, Polonius speaks of Ophelia as the cause of Hamlet’s sadness. Second, she is the first person Hamlet sees after his encounter with the ghost and she speaks of his strange behavior in Act II, scene i. Therefore, at this point, Ophelia becomes an object of his anger towards all women, as a “breeder of sinners.” He rejects her as the object of his desire and in this sense she becomes the symbolic phallus, rejected by the subject as a symbol signifying life.

To repeat Lacan here, the symbolic order is sustained by the phallus. The phallus is the original signifier, stemming from the order of the patriarchal society. The cultural unconscious conditions human desire in relation to the signifier, and functions as the mark of identification for Hamlet, as the subject. In terms of phallocentrism, Hamlet’s desire is dependent on the desire of the other, the phallus. In this case, the other is the ghost. The phallus creates and shapes desire in the subject, Hamlet. The ghost holds power over him, controlling his action and his desire. The paradox here is that Hamlet represses the desire of the phallus, yet it is the other’s desire that defines him as the subject. This is a classic example of the Lacanian “missed encounter.” Hamlet as the subject is missed. He is always missing, always shifting in his desire.

Lacan’s notion of the phallus associates the barring of the subject Hamlet with the phallus, which allows the object to exist only in desire. The phallus, even the real phallus, is a ghost, according to Lacan. He calls this
"phallophany", meaning that the appearance of the non-symbolized phallus appears from behind the mother’s (the other’s) desire. The phallus is what is believed to be the key to the entire Oedipal theory. Because there is an absence of the phallic signifier, Hamlet is unable to find his place. ‘Phallocentrism’ may also be described as how the law of the father produces itself by its family structure and cultural codes. Furthermore, the phallus symbolically divides gender and sexual identity.

Hamlet cannot kill Claudius, his father’s killer and his mother’s lover, and he cannot love Ophelia because he cannot want. Even though he is driven by the desire of his father (other), Hamlet cannot kill Claudius because he remains a symbol of the phallus (other). In the end, when he discovers his desire by fighting with Laertes in the hole that has been dug to bury Ophelia, he has a revelation, linked to his final death. For Lacan, this is the masculine drama of desire and the anxiety of the "To be or not to be." There is both love and desire for the mother and Ophelia, which is intertwined with the jealousy of the father. Hamlet’s alienation, (which is depicted in his famous speech) stems from his desire for his mother. Moreover, the subject as object revises the “to be” speech and exemplifies the state of Hamlet’s mind.

The ambiguity of Hamlet’s desire remains complex and controversial. I believe his desire to be directly linked to the conflict with his mother and the oedipal conflict, blinding him and smothering his choice of desire. His desire is
also defined in the other. The act of revenge becomes a representation of his inability to act on his own will of desire. He gains no control when it comes to his shifting desire. If Hamlet stands in the place of “the object”, characterizing the desire of psychoanalysis, I believe the feminine desire of that object bends the critical metaphors of desire and its interpretation.
Chapter Two
Hamlet’s ‘Tragic Flaw’

Hamlet’s shifting desire, oedipal conflict, excessive reflection, mourning and confusion are all causes of his delay of action or what has been called his ‘tragic flaw’. In chapter one, I mentioned briefly the enigma of Hamlet’s inability to act. Having looked briefly into the true essence of his dilemma, I believe that Hamlet cannot accomplish the revenge act because of his oedipal conflict, related to the phallus. Furthermore, he delays because of the loss of self in his mourning for his father’s death. Hamlet feels it is ridiculous for him to revenge his father’s death in a dysfunctional world. “Knowledge kills action; action requires the veils of illusion; that is the doctrine of Hamlet, not that cheap wisdom of Jack the Dreamer who reflects too much and as it were, from an excess of possibilities does not get around to action” (Freud 264). Even after Claudius provokes Hamlet to avenge his father’s death Hamlet is too slow to act (III.iv).

Hamlet is a man whose direct action is paralyzed by an excessive development of his mind. In The Interpretation of Dreams, Sigmund Freud believed that the roots of the play came from Oedipus Rex, the original myth where the Oedipus complex stems from. As I see it, Freud’s position seems a

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(Continued on next page)
bit ambiguous. There is more than one reason for Hamlet's delay. The Oedipus complex is not the sole cause of his delay.

In *Oedipus*, the child's wishful fantasy is brought out and realized, as it would be in a dream. But in *Hamlet* it remains repressed. As in the case of neurosis, one only learns of its existence from its restraining consequences. Freud and Lacan are obsessed with looking at Hamlet's inability to act upon the duty of revenge he is told to perform. And Shakespeare has eluded us, giving us no noticeable motives for Hamlet's inaction.

We do see Hamlet take action in three specific instances. First, he kills Polonius who is obscured behind a curtain. Second, he substitutes a letter commanding the execution of Rosencrantz and Guilderstern, which was intended for him. Third, he writes and executes the court play. And in each instance, when he finally acts, it is always too soon. Therefore, it is apparent that Hamlet is able to take action, except when it concerns the act of revenge. Instead, his conscience gets the best of him and the tragic flaw lies in unconscious reasons for his inability to act. So, I believe that this is what makes Hamlet mad. Nonetheless, neurotic symptoms and dreams or visions (like the vision of his father's ghost) can be over-analyzed and are definitely open to more than one interpretation.

According to Freud, the killing of King Hamlet and the marriage of a murderer with Hamlet's mother were realizations of Hamlet's own childish
wishes. Hamlet’s condition should be accounted for by his incestuous fantasy. Yet, there is more than an incestuous fantasy causing Hamlet’s tragic flaw. When the ghost tells him of the murder, the nephew cannot kill the uncle because he sees in him the image of his own desire. This is mimetic desire, one idea that Rene Girard discusses in *Violence and the Sacred* and will be discussed further in chapter three. It is the source of continuous conflict when the making of one man’s desire turns into or mimics another man’s desire, leading to rivalry, turning into violence. The paternal ghost burdens the son with his mother’s sins, dividing him from himself. In this way “the shadow of the object” falls upon Hamlet. My interpretation agrees with Girard’s argument over Freud’s, because I believe Hamlet’s inability to act stems from mimetic desire, much more than from incestuous passion. I will expound Girard’s theory in chapter three.

By interpreting the play in Freudian terms *Hamlet* is an elaborated and disguised account of a boy’s love for his mother and consequent jealousy of and hatred towards his father. This view can account for Hamlet’s state of mind at the beginning of the play. When the ghost reveals the murder to him, he exclaims “O my prophetic soul!” as if he already suspected the guilt of his uncle. But even without the stigma of incest, the quickness of events stuns him with a double blow and floods his mind with images of disintegration and death. The relationship between mother and father and their sexual signifiers, the
breast and phallus, is not an antithesis but instead a translation effected by Hamlet’s mourning.

For Freud, Hamlet is a repressed and belated Oedipus. The psychoanalytic interpreter translates Hamlet’s problems into Oedipus desire. As Freud states, “Here I have translated into conscious terms what was bound to remain unconscious in Hamlet’s mind” (Freud 265). I disagree with this idea. Hamlet is conscious of what the ghost tells him to do, and of his situation. His delay is not solely caused by Oedipal desire. Freud wraps this theory into a tight package, with no way of opening it to alternative views. Freud is unbending and close-minded in this respect.

But the trouble with the psychoanalytic interpretation of Hamlet lies more in what it omits, than in what it includes. By tracing the problems of Hamlet’s psyche to his infantile fantasies, it leaves out the significance of Hamlet as dramatic art. The Freudian interpretation omits the significance of the play within the play, which I feel is central to the drama. My belief is that his own instincts and a long exorbitant struggle with his father’s request overwhelm Hamlet. Psychoanalytic ideas refuse this argument, assuming Hamlet’s tragic mysteries are mere infantile fantasies in disguise.

From the Freudian interpretation comes the idea that Hamlet’s hesitation stems literally from being jealous of his father and being in love with his mother. He wants to kill his uncle because he sees him as a rival for the
possession of his mother. But as I stated, he does not want to kill him because he recognizes in him an image of his own desire. This is his reason for hesitation. Another reason he cannot kill his uncle is because he would be resorting to the kind of violence that took his father’s life and he unconsciously hates violence.

This leads me back to the discussion of the Oedipal reading of Hamlet. The purpose of Ernest Jones’ psychoanalytic reading of the play is to uncover facts and bring to light traits in Hamlet’s character which were formerly unconscious or unmanageable under the ego’s control. Freud is concerned with the notion, as revealed in his famous line “Where id was, there ego shall be.” ⁴ For Lacan, this notion was only a fantasy of the ego itself, and he retranslates the statement into “There where it was, so it must come to be” (Ecrits 524).

The difference between Hamlet and Oedipus is that Oedipus unknowingly acts out this fantasy. For Hamlet it is repressed into the unconscious, revealing itself in the form of that inability to act which has confused so many critics of the play. It is this repression of the Oedipal complex underlying the text which leads Freud to say that Hamlet demonstrates the ‘secular advance of repression in the emotional life of mankind’ (Freud 264, 366). As stated, Hamlet is not just Oedipus, but melancholic and hysteric. Both of these readings are interesting because they bring to us the limits of interpretation and sexual identity at the same time.
Calling Hamlet ‘mad’ or ‘hysteric’ has the same effect as calling into question the sexual difference since it raises the question of femininity and upsets the Oedipal reading of the play. Freud sees the Oedipal complex in the play as the desire for the mother and rivalry with the father. But the discovery of the pre-oedipal attachment to the mother led him to modify this view, so that desire is not just seen as male and female desire. By modifying his own theory, he undermines it, and the oedipal theory eventually loses its validity.

Another problem in Hamlet’s psyche is alleged matricide. Hamlet does not to kill the father, but the mother instead. The soliloquy reads

.../Let not ever
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom;
Let me be cruel, not unnatural.
I will speak daggars to her, but use none./...

(III.ii. 384-7)

Gertrude replies, ‘What wilt thou do? Thou will not murder me? Help! Ho!’ (III.iv.20-1). What follows is Hamlet murdering Polonius from behind the curtain. In effect what happens is that his desire is reversed and the woman (his mother) becomes guilty for the circumstances she provokes. Furthermore, this idea of matricide remains committed to an Oedipal reading of the play, since violence towards the mother is an effect of a desire for her. Freud disagrees with the idea that femininity lies underneath the whole Oedipal
scheme of the drama, but I believe it indicates the impossibility of resolution in the play. On the other hand, if I were to agree with the Oedipal reading, it would seem impossible not to blame the mother.

The following speech by Hamlet is given after the King and Queen depart from the stage. In it we see how his mother’s lack of feeling affects him and his emotions.

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not fix’d
His canon ‘gainst self-slaughter! O God. God!
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on’t! Ah, fie! ‘tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
But two months dead! Nay, not so much, not two.
So excellent a king that was to this
Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!
Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on; and yet, within a month-
Let me not think on’t. Frailty, thy name is woman-
A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she followed my poor father’s body,
Like Niobe, all tears-why she, even she-
O God! A beast that wants discourse of reason
Would have mourn’d longer —married with my uncle,
My father’s brother; but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules. Within a month,
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married. O, most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets.
It is not, nor it cannot come to good.
But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

(I.ii.129-159)

This speech invites an Oedipal reading of the play. In view of this, it can be said that Hamlet's Oedipus anxiety is real and not a repressed fantasy. He also protests a great deal in this speech his father's virtuosity to his uncle. Moreover, he is preoccupied with his mother's sexual desire. We see this in Hamlet throughout the play. They are not merely a function of his characterization, but instead inhabit the entire play. Hamlet has every reason to be obsessed with events, especially with a dead father who continues to haunt him and remind him of revenge. Hamlet's condition not only causes us to question his character and psyche, but also shows his mourning and suffering.

In General Psychology Theory, Freud states “though grief involves grave departures from the normal attitude to life, it never occurs to us to regard it as a morbid condition and hand the mourner over to medical treatment. We rest assured that after a lapse of time will be overdone and we look upon any interference with it as inadvisable or even harmful” (Freud 165). He asserts that this grief is a struggle between the human condition and the reality of the loss. The key to understanding Hamlet's condition is the perception that the self-criticism of depression is anger turned inwards.

After Hamlet finishes the speech above, the ghost of his father appears to him and becomes both a structural and a psychic turning point in the play.
Act one, scene five begins with Hamlet expressing pity for the ghost and the ghost insisting on a more serious purpose. The ghost then confirms to him “.../The serpent that did sting thy father’s life/Now wears his crown/...,” and ends with “.../Adieu, adieu, adieu! Remember me” (I.v.80). Hamlet’s answer to the ghost is profound. It expresses his state of mind and feeling until the beginning of the last act of the play. The most important part of this scene is the ghost’s insistence to remember him, which intensifies Hamlet’s mourning. This mourning is an internal process that begins with healing the ego, differentiating itself from the object of loss and a slow cutting of ties with his father (Freud). But this is exactly what the ghost forbids with a lack of sympathy for his grief. He wants Hamlet to give murderous purpose to his anger, compelling Hamlet to a regressive movement towards perversion. This constitutes the unconscious dynamics of his depression. It can be said that the ghost moves Hamlet toward the realm of death causing his state of mind to change at the beginning of Act V, when he finally comes to grips with the ghost, his father’s death and his mourning. Hamlet’s denial of the mother’s flesh in the name of the father’s spirit, and the violence of the maternal loss are both represented and evaded by the ghostly father.

Through mourning, Hamlet suffers the loss of self. Ironically, his loss of self defines himself. In his well-known essay *Mourning and Melancholia*,
Freud associates mourning with the object-relationship. The lost object is Hamlet’s father. He finds himself mourning for a lost object that unexpectedly reappears in the form of a vision. He questions the reality of the ghost and therefore his mourning becomes questionable, driving Hamlet hysteric.

Ophelia also becomes an object of loss while Hamlet as the subject suffers the loss and mourns once again over the lost object. In the graveyard scene, it is vividly apparent that the object lost was an object of desire. The unbearable loss is what Lacan and Freud refer to as the ‘hole in the real’. The hole in the ‘real’ results from the loss of the object and sets the signifier into motion. The signifier becomes mourning and this mourning takes the place of the phallus. This phenomenon is where mourning arrives and where madness originates in the individual. The ghost becomes the signifier of Hamlet’s mourning, and at the same time it is mourning that is brought into question.

By reading Hamlet in this way, I see his confusion in mourning as a signifier for his inability to act. Mourning happens at the level of logos and it is created from the hole that is formed as a result of the death of the father.

Hamlet is conscious of his confused state of mind. Here I am convinced that Hamlet’s ‘madness’ is feigned, largely because he is conscious of the manic role he plays. Hamlet recognizes his own delay, when he says “Why do I linger?” in Act two (to be discussed further in chapter three). I believe that
Hamlet feigns madness and puts on a mask of madness in order to perform a
coup d'etat. He acts this way in order to escape suspicion. Yet, Jan Kott in
Shakespeare Our Contemporary still argues that Hamlet has truly gone mad or
hysteric. Hamlet is mad because politics (the court world) is madness itself
when it destroys all feeling and affection (Kott 62). I believe that although he is
disturbed by these events, he uses the feelings drawn from mourning and his
mother's remarriage to his advantage, as a sort of mask.

Hamlet is disturbed, but what materializes in his psyche is more than
this. It is his way of dealing with the ghost that has entered his life whom he
cannot fully trust. He still questions who killed his father. He looks for
convincing evidence, stages a play portraying the supposed crime, and thinks
pensively about the act of revenge he is told he must perform. His brain is
unable to bear the strain put upon it. In The Subjection of Hamlet: An Essay,
William Leighton thinks that his intellectual activities are too great for his
physical powers. It invades his judgement, becoming the chief agency in
overwhelming and wrecking his splendid activities. Due to his already fragile
state of mind, his judgement is clouded into doing something which he knows is
morally wrong, yet he is determined to revenge his father's death.

The Oedipal reading of the play has a triadic structure. First, Hamlet's
mourning is pathological. Second, his oedipal issues are interpreted as the
transference of his childhood experiences (with his mother). Third, his mourning is viewed as a kind of faded tragedy, in which it is inflicted upon himself as a sort of self-punishment. Freud discusses this in detail in The Interpretation of Dreams, 1900. “The repeated association of Hamlet and Oedipus find a parallel in the contiguity between mourning the mother and uncovering the Oedipal scenario. Freud’s presentation of Hamlet as a secondary, inhibiting Oedipus resembles his lapsed attention to mourning in the process of inflecting the Oedipal, and the accompanying displacement from the lost mother to the hostile father” (Freud 298). Kenneth Reinhard disagrees with Freud and the Oedipal argument the main reason for Hamlet’s delay, and I share his position.

Hamlet creates himself out of the world and the world out of himself. His melancholic state is pathological, but is not directly caused by the Oedipal desire of his mother. He has a dyadic desire and his confusion is fated towards the end of the play, making the play tragic. Furthermore there is more than one reason for Hamlet’s tragic delay.

The distortion and delay of Hamlet’s sadness, interpreted through the Oedipal tragedy and Freudian terms, can become a bit foggy. At times, Freud takes Hamlet’s mourning into account as cause of an absent mother and sometimes he ignores it. Because of this I conclude that Freud uses Hamlet as a
way to narrate his beliefs, and his allegories of mourning. He fits it to this theory only when it is convenient for him.

Ernest Jones published his first essay on Hamlet and the Oedipus complex in 1910. In the book *Hamlet and Oedipus* he suggests that Hamlet represents the prevalence of neurosis in psychic life. His interpretation is like a reinstatement of Freud’s beliefs on Hamlet’s character.

Jones’ book is effective in his argument, but still open to objections to his assumptions. First, I don’t feel that Hamlet’s only problem is his inability to act. Hamlet fails to demonstrate a complete reason for his inability to act and his failure to kill his uncle, the king. Hamlet’s tendency to rationalize provokes the idea that he really does have hidden motives. Hamlet’s delay is a major problem for him. Second, Hamlet’s mad reaction to his mother’s incestuous marriage confirms his deep connection and relationship with her. Furthermore, it reaffirms my opinion as well as Freud’s inferences. Claudius’ crime brings about feelings in Hamlet that had been there all along and he cannot kill him, because if he did, it would be like wanting to kill what he truly wished, the rival for his mother’s love. In psychological terms, this would be like killing himself because he sees himself in his father and this is the subconscious origin of oedipal desire.
In his fully developed interpretation, Jones states that all drama is a representation of real life and action, and that the motives of dramatic behavior are reflective of real-life behavior. His idea seems quite absolute and overgeneralized, for not all dramatic work is mimetic of real life. Nonetheless, in Hamlet I believe that Shakespeare did incorporate a number of details from his own life in the play. This idea harks back to Freud. "It is the expression of deep-seated mental processes in the artist's unconscious" which is the "source of Shakespeare's inspiration in the creation of Hamlet, lay in the deepest, oldest part of his being" (Weitz ix).

Second, Jones omits the words Hamlet uses to describe his father. This is a fundamental part of Hamlet's speech one has to analyze in order to understand his expression of love for his father, and it is very important to include in any such argument, yet he ignores them. Hamlet's expression of love for his father is very important to analyze in order to understand his psyche and the play as a whole.

According to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, it is circumstances that provoke Hamlet's endless reasoning and "perpetual solicitation" of the mind to act, as a constant escape from action (Leighton 10, 24). I agree that he has a deficiency and a lacking that cause his delay. Hamlet makes excuses for not acting and does not take advantage of his opportunity for revenge. He postpones his
Uncle's death, till he can take him in some act ".../That has no relish of salvation in't/..." (III.iii.92).

Coleridge and Schegel assume Hamlet delays because of his excessive reflection. It is true that even before that ghost appears to Hamlet, he is reflecting on his life. After the ghost appears, he keeps on thinking and reflecting more than acting. But I disagree with their theory because I don't feel that his excessive intellectual activity is the cause of his hesitancy. The idea that Hamlet delays because he thinks too much is ridiculous. This theory implies that Hamlet's intelligence is the cause of his tragic flaw. This is false because it implies what is too true. Anyone in Hamlet's situation would be pensive in thought. This is not the cause of his tragic delay.

As previously stated, Hamlet delays for a number of reasons. I have discussed Hamlet's mourning of his father's death. In Shakespearean Tragedy, A.C. Bradley asserts that the series of circumstances in the play causes Hamlet to become melancholic. I believe his feelings are apparent in his "To be or not be" soliloquy. Second, in the Freudian reading of the play, oedipal issues are a direct cause of his tragic flaw. Third, Hamlet's shifting desire is reason for his inaction (covered in chapter one). Fourth, he is confused about who the ghost is. He questions his own mind, in relation to the ghost, trying to figure out if it is his father or the devil. This happens at the end of the second soliloquy.
During Elizabethan times there was a conundrum of attitudes towards ghosts and this can be linked to part of his disbelief. A. C. Bradley believes that the ghost is not an apparition. The ghost is “the representative of that hidden ultimate power, the messenger of divine justice set upon the expiation of offences which appeared impossible for a man to discover and avenge, a reminder or a symbol of the connection of the limited world of ordinary experience with the vaster life of which it is but a partial appearance” (Bradley 3). Likewise, I purport that the ghost is real and Shakespeare knew that by making the ghost ambiguous, he would confuse Hamlet and the reader. The ghost’s appearance is a reminder of time passing by and the lingering of the past over the present. The mystery of the ghost becomes a symbol of the future death of Hamlet.

The ghost is seen by the guards and Horatio in Act one. This makes Hamlet believe that the ghost is not just in his imagination. But Hamlet is haunted with his father’s image. Regressing back to the phallus, Hamlet waits to act and cannot act because the real phallus is a ghost.

Finally, my position on why Hamlet delays is informed by an awareness of his inability to understand who the ghost really is. He doesn’t want to hurt anyone, including his mother, yet he is mad at her. He is confused and mourning at the same time. Hamlet’s lack of clarity in his mind and the
development of external circumstances play a part in his inaction. Although his
oedipal conflict plays a large role in his inaction, my reading posits the view
that Hamlet’s confusion, mourning, and shifting desire are key reasons for his
tragic flaw.
Chapter Three: Madness and Mimesis

Many generations and audiences have seen their own reflections in the play. Perhaps the genius of Hamlet consists in the fact that the play can serve as a mirror image of ourselves. Hamlet’s state of mind has been debated for years. I will explore whether Hamlet is truly mad or if he feigns his madness. Hamlet’s madness and the theme of mimesis are closely related and intertwined in each other within the play.

I don’t believe that Hamlet goes mad literally. He just allows the rest of us to think he does and he has his reasons for doing so. He has an obligation to his dead father. But the way he fulfills his obligation to his father is wrong. He fails to act in any definite line of consistent purpose. As argued in chapter two, Hamlet is unable to act in revenge. The three times Hamlet is decisive is not consistent with mad behavior. Hamlet neglects what he deems a sacred duty. He waits and ponders in pensive reflection. He descends to the inferior part of the court-jester. He breaks the heart of the lady he dearly loves. He uselessly and recklessly kills her father, with no sign of sorrow or remorse for the deed. He insults Laertes’ legitimate grief at Ophelia’s grave. Finally he goes stumbling to the catastrophe of his death (Leighton 10, 24). These actions can be deemed as those of a madman. He has an emotional disorder stemming from
his father’s death and mourning for his death, which some people never recover from. But his actions, though severe, do not establish madness. He is abrupt due to his lack of experience.

Hamlet feigns his madness when he tells Ophelia to “Get thee to a nunnery!...” (III.1.121) He knows that he is being overheard and doesn’t want these spies to hear his true confessions of love, because it would take away from the mask of his madness. He wants everyone, including Ophelia, to think he lost his mind. He plays the role of a madman the most when he treats Ophelia with rudeness that seems to be useless cruelty. He is aware that he must act as if he is mad in order to carry out the request of his father’s ghost.

Hamlet’s madness also stems from his subjection to his surroundings, having to depend on the will of his uncle and his mother’s marriage under his nose. He doubts himself because of the confusing circumstances. The problem with Hamlet’s psyche is that he is too easily influenced. He is constantly falling into entanglements that come out of circumstances, generally the influence of other minds.

The case of Hamlet’s madness has been discussed extensively by critics like Goethe, Graham Bradshaw, Jan Kott, Morris Weitz. But conclusions about his condition have come from a very narrow view, based on a mere diagnosis of the case and not on the completion of his character. Rather,
Hamlet can be seen as a psychologist himself. He is a close observer, who continually analyzes his own nature and that of others. His irony is that all who come into contact with him see themselves as who they really are. If this sort of man assumes madness, he plays his part perfectly. If Shakespeare himself, without going mad, could observe and remember all the abnormal symptoms and then be able to reproduce them in Hamlet’s character, why should it be beyond Hamlet’s power to reproduce them in himself?

Hamlet’s feigned madness is one of the original themes that has remained in the play. Hamlet drifts through the entire tragedy. He never keeps on one track long enough to get ‘steerage-way.’ The scheme of this simulated insanity is precisely the one he would have been likely to see. This is because it allowed him to drift without a decisive purpose, postponing his action by the very means he uses to arrive at a feat. He does this with the showing of doing something that he may escape the longer dreaded necessity of really doing anything at all. It allows him to play with life and his duty, instead of taking up seriously. He is on the way to accomplishing his revenge while he is negotiating his own irresolution. It is true genius of Shakespeare that Hamlet should play a madman. The one thing Hamlet could not do was to bring himself to revenge. He kills Polonius, when he cannot see his victim. He doesn’t commit suicide. He talks of daggers but used none against his mother.
He avoids the chance to kill the king, using the excuse not to do it while he is praying, so his soul may be saved. He allows himself to be sent to England so as to flee from his present duty to avenge his father's death. Hamlet sees things only too clearly, as he is intelligent. William Beatty Warner says it is chance at last that brings him to his death.

It has been said that Hamlet acts the madman to hide his thoughts, like Brutus. But the case of Brutus is not that of Hamlet. Hamlet acts mad for his safety. Brutus screens his project, Hamlet his person. Hamlet knows he is in danger the moment the ghost reveals to him the crime. In Hamlet's time, to know that the king was an assassin was a state crime. He knew that a man suspected of suspicion was lost. So, he has only one choice, which is to play the innocent and to feign madness. The effect of this alleged madness is to dull the king's suspicion.

A reason why Hamlet is thought to be mad by Freud, Jones and others is that he is irrational. He acts without reflection and he reflects without acting. Here is where the absurdity lies. He conceals his discovery and postpones his vengeance. Again, this is not madness because his intellect remains clear, and his discourse is sound. But the indirection of his will mocks himself, and invents in his mind action which is useless for his purposes.
Another reason for this act of alleged madness Hamlet plays out is that he is fearful of reality. This pretence would enable him to have some time to think and to grieve. It may be agreeable to say that Hamlet’s condition is diseased, but this is different from hysteria. His ‘disease’ or melancholia could very easily turn into insanity. The longing for death might have become self-destructive and his feelings might have extended to his sense and intellect. But Hamlet is far from delusional. His condition is very different from the madness he feigns and he never exhibits these signs of true madness. Critics like G. Wilson Knight and Robert Weimann would disagree with me here. They believe that Hamlet’s masquerade arouses rather than hides suspicion. Still, there seems to be more than one answer to the question of Hamlet’s madness.

One reading of Hamlet’s state of mind is that his madness is feigned according to mimetic desire. He mimics the mind of a madman, and does this because he desires what his father desires and has to hide his true drive and true motives.

In the beginning of this chapter, I began to discuss the idea of mimesis in Hamlet. It is a central theme within the play and Hamlet perhaps illustrates mimetic desire the best out of all of Shakespeare’s plays. We see this idea applied best in the play within the play called The Mousetrap, since mimesis is associated with the state of discursive and non-discursive activity, or “Suit the
action to the word and the word to the action” (Girard 143). The preparation and presentation of the play within the play assumes a critical function in the dramatic process. *The Mousetrap* is a self-conscious tool of the play’s awareness of the function and theme of mimesis itself. It is this mimesis of mimesis that helps to link the drama and the theme. By doing this, it provokes a level of contradiction between theory and practice, or speaking and acting, which links to the primary theme of Hamlet’s struggle. In order to look at this more closely, Hamlet advises the players:

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue... Nor do not saw the air to much with your hand, thus, but use all gently... For anything so o’erdone is form the purpose of the playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold as ‘twere the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.

(III.ii 1-24)

The speech’s purpose is to tell the players how to perform and to give them an understanding of the purpose of the play. Mimesis in this connection is defined to the work of the actors and not to the dramatic text. This advice emphasizes their use of voice and performance and on things theatrical. This is seen as his speech progresses, telling the players how to get a certain kind of audience response. So, here mimesis then serves as a “necessary question of the play”
(III.ii.42-3) because it touches on the requirements of a theatrical production within the play in which Hamlet and the other players are already performing. The text of his speech touches on the tension between what is theatre versus a performance by travelling actors. This tension makes his speech dramatic and creates urgency and significance within the play as a whole.

Therefore the mimesis of mimesis, which the players' scenes and the play within the play project, helps to stress the problem of representation itself. This marks the contradiction between the signifying “image of a murder done in Vienna” (III.ii.233) and the signified reproduction of Claudius’ crime. This is also demonstrated in Ophelia’s reaction to the play. She says “Will ‘a tell us what this show meant?” (III.ii.139) and Hamlet’s reply is “Ah, or any show that you will show him. Be not you ashamed to show, he’ll not shame to tell you what it means.” It is a rude remark but it tells us of the use of presentation and representation, the interaction of what is shown and what is meant.

The entire play is filled with mimesis. Beginning with The Mousetrap we can continue to see recurring themes in the play, like the death of fathers, the story of their death, and the mourning of women.

Furthermore, we can see the many forms of mimesis taking shape within the character of Hamlet. I have already discussed mimetic desire and Hamlet’s mimetic desire for another man’s desire. His father and then his uncle
leads him to rival his uncle and want his mother. But because there is a mimetic relationship between his uncle and himself, he cannot kill Claudius because in Claudius he sees the image of his own desire.

There is a struggle between what is shown and what is meant in Hamlet’s character. It is between his related ability to disassociating himself from the outside world and associating with his own feigning. The forms of mimesis used to create Hamlet’s character are very strong. This tension is obvious in what Hamlet says and does at court compared to the way he is the rest of the time in the play. This contradiction is important to the analysis of his psyche. He is one person at court and another when he is ‘mad’ and releases his ‘antic disposition’.

Again, there is a conflict in this theory of mimesis that René Girard examines in *Violence and the Sacred*. (Girard tends to isolate the conflicting element in nonrepresentational mimesis, its primal pattern of action, rivalry and victimization.) Some of the uses of mimesis that relate to Hamlet are his role as theoretician when he advises the players, his role as a theatre critic, and then his activities as a dramatist, director, chorus and actor. As an author, Hamlet writes “some sixteen lines, which I would set down and insert in’t...” (II.ii.535-6), he arranges for the production (III.ii.232), and serves “as good as a chorus...’” (III.ii.240) and he manages to do all of these things. Hamlet speaks
the first 13 lines of the player's speech and his acting also serves as role-playing which is a representation of his own mimetic theory and writing.

Even in Hamlet's feigned madness, he is still playing a *role*. His madness continues to serve as subversion in his role in the play. Madness as a method of mimesis decreases the link between the person representing and the represented (Girard). When Hamlet is at court, it serves as a release to what he represents. In this way there is a complicated mixture to his method of madness (II.ii.205). When he says ".../I am too much in the sun" (I.ii.67) he alludes to the demands he feels from the position in court he is supposed to represent.

Hamlet is both a product and a producer of mimesis. He is a character performing a role and one who he himself performs and produces a performance. So, *The Mousetrap* can be seen as a metaphor of the world of the play through mimesis, and as affecting Hamlet's position in the play.

Another aspect of mimesis in *Hamlet* is a kind of mimetic sympathy that occurs between his mother and his uncle. Hamlet begs his mother to give up her relationship with Claudius. He does not feel indignant enough to kill his uncle, and as stated previously, this has to do with mimetic desire. As a result he feels uncomfortable about himself and he blames his mother because she is so indifferent. He unconsciously wants Gertrude to take revenge for him. He
wants to gain the sympathy he hopes she feels, but there is none. He must receive from someone else, a mimetic model he does not have within himself. This is what he tries to achieve with his mother, but has no success.

At this point the person Hamlet mimics is Laertes. It is by his example and mimetic model that Hamlet finally acts. First, Laertes is Hamlet’s peer and his situation parallels Hamlet’s. When Hamlet see Laertes jump into Ophelia’s grave, it affects him. It is at this point, after speaking with Horatio, that Hamlet decides to act according to the demands of the world around him and in a way become a “Laertes”.

‘Swounds, show me what thou’lt do.  
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. Dost thou come here to whine?  
To outface me with leaping in her grave?  
Be buried quick with her, and so will I.  
(V.i. 241-246)

The above lines show that Hamlet finally realizes that he has to enter the mimetic circle of desire and rivalry. He had been unable to do this up until this point in the play, and here he reaches a hysteric condition. These words are an expression of the mimetic frenzy that leads to his role as a victim (Girard 1).

Like all victims of mimetic suggestion, Hamlet reverses the hierarchy that exists between the other and himself. He states, “For by the image of my
cause I see, The portraiture of his” when instead he should be saying “by the
image of his cause I see the portraiture of mine/” (II,ii). The latter one is the
correct one. We can already see mimesis working in the tears of the actor’s and
displayed by Fortinbras. To see Laertes as a mimetic model, it is pertinent to
look at the last two lines of Hamlet’s speech, “.../But, sure, the bravery of his
grief did put me, Into a towering passion.” His determination to act as Laertes
is seen in his elevated passion and Laertes has finally empathized with him
through his grief.

The more advanced stages of mimesis are more compulsive and
destructive as the play progresses. A psychiatrist might diagnose Hamlet’s
outburst inside Ophelia’s grave as the types of symptoms belonging to a
schizophrenic. The irony here is that Hamlet is not consciously aware that his
behavior and desire are mimetic. The question then becomes ‘What is Hamlet,
the ‘schizophrenic’ trying to achieve in his dramatic actions and mimicry?’
Simply put, he is trying to be normal in the world around him that appears mad.
He desires to be like Laertes who is not afraid to act, without appearing
hysteric. Hamlet desperately tries to be the way it is expected of him, or
rather, I believe he merely pretends in order to feign madness and suspend
action.
Contrary to what Freud suggests, desire at every stage learns more about itself. When Hamlet and Laertes jump in the grave, his desire is fully developed. But every stage of mimetic desire sets importance over experience and uses it for its own purposes. Therefore, Hamlet must finally turn himself and the world of those around him into a ‘theatre of cruelty.’

Shakespeare’s own life mimics the play he wrote. This can be taken even further. We can interpret it as being doubly autobiographical. Hamlet may be representing Shakespeare and the modern reader may be representing Hamlet. Freud agrees with the idea that Hamlet is a mask of Shakespeare. According to Freud, Shakespeare represents himself in Hamlet as a mourner, and also names the hero after his son named Hamnet. This ambivalent identification with both father and son divides and constitutes the subject by turning Oedipal rage against itself. In addition, by naming the play after his dead son, the drama becomes an epitaph and a tragic one at that. Freud’s reading of Hamlet as an autobiographical character is described in The Interpretation of Dreams.

What I disagree with is the question of authorship that is mentioned in Freud’s General Psychological Theory (SE 4:266n). Freud says that although Hamlet may be Shakespeare, Shakespeare is not Shakespeare. I disagree.
There is a very high possibility that Hamlet was modeled after Shakespeare's own life, an indication that Shakespeare wrote the play. Marjorie Garber also denounces this idea, stating that the plays are ghost-written. Shakespeare undermines the legacy of Shakespeare's mimetic identification with the play.

Freud speaks through Hamlet, and his opinion becomes a mask of his own idea, by denying authorship. The mere fact that Freud spent so much time on an analysis of Shakespeare, and his insistence that Hamlet functions as a symbol of Shakespeare's mourning for his real son, deconstructs his own idea.

The contradiction lies in the text The Interpretation of Dreams, in which Freud reads Hamlet as Shakespeare's autobiography and mimesis of his own life. At the same time, he takes on Hamlet as his own mask. If we view Hamlet as doubly autobiographical, in which the subject is written through alienating texts and images of the other and the lack of self makes this reading very allegorical. Both psychoanalysis and literature narrate allegories of mourning, "representations of mourning that cast representation as mourning, as the recuperation and repetition of loss" (Freud 208). Mimesis here, seen in the form of autobiography, is not only a genre, but a function of fiction and the styles within the writing of Hamlet and the psychological elements that are contained in them.
Chapter Four: T.S. Eliot’s New Reading

T. S. Eliot’s critique of Hamlet marks a move away from the psychoanalytic approach. He offers a “new” reading of the play from the perspective of new criticism. My interpretation of Eliot’s criticism is a move away from this criticism. Eliot believes that the play is the primary problem and Hamlet’s character only secondary. He makes it clear that the problem of Hamlet is that it is ‘full of stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate or manipulate into art’ (Eliot 48). Hamlet is dominated by an emotion that is inexpressible because it is in excess of the facts as they appear. He defines objective correlative as,

“a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.”

(Eliot, 124-5)

He describes the conditions in which Hamlet fails and it is here where he first produces the concept of ‘objective correlative’. In other words, the only way to attempt a definition of objective correlative is a set of objects or a chain of events shall be the formula for a particular emotion. The concept is seen in other works by Shakespeare, but here it is deficient, according to Eliot. He feels the play is a failure because it has no objective correlative. Eliot vaguely
defines what he means by objective correlative. I am also struck by the way in which he limits it to emotion in art. Eliot makes a judgement, yet he fails to explain Hamlet’s inner qualities extensively.

In response to Eliot, I would like to point out that Hamlet does have more than enough objective correlatives. He has objective provocation with his dead father, his uncle as the king, and his mother’s incestuous marriage to force and provoke him. I believe that Hamlet is motivated against his mother with a true objective correlative. Furthermore, in tragedy, there are only subjective correlatives. A tragic hero like Hamlet is moved not only by circumstances. His inner drive also moves him beyond objectivity. Eliot knows this, but he doesn’t point out the tragedy of it.

Eliot’s claim raises a serious argument. He states that Hamlet is not a work of art because it does not contain an objective correlative. It is clear that this claim is not completely self-evident. He gives examples of what this term means, yet fails to define the concept, and we are left wondering what he means by it, and why he narrows it to emotion in art.

Hamlet is disgusted by his mother but she is not an equivalent for his anger. His disgust exceeds her. He cannot understand the feeling or objectify it and it remains to ruin his life and prevent his action. The mother is seen as the cause of the problems in the play and she represents its aesthetic failure. First,
there is the sexual failure of Gertrude and her alarm in response to finding out about the crime. Second, there is a repetition of the drama of sexual difference in which the women are seen as the cause of such a failure in representation, as something deficient or threatening to the system and to sexual life itself. By choosing a woman to represent profound femininity in the play, Shakespeare links the enigma of femininity to the problem of interpretation itself. So what Eliot seems to be inferring is that what is horrible is nothing other than femininity itself.

Eliot’s criticism is filled with sexuality and has been an area of great debate among critics like Sigmund Freud, Shoshana Felman and Jacqueline Rose. For Eliot, the sexuality of women becomes the scapegoat, the cause of problems and creates the breakdown of the oedipal resolution. Hamlet’s mother is the figure of the feminine whose inadequacies led T.S. Eliot to formulate the ideal of the objective correlative. One view of the play’s problem is that femininity is the image of that problem.

Hamlet is dominated by an emotion that is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear, according to Eliot. Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother, but that his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her... (I)t is just because her character is so negative and insignificant that she arouses in Hamlet
the feeling which she is incapable of representing” (Sacred Wood 100).

Therefore, this interpretation marks the move away from a psychoanalytic view, and one that leads up to femininity as the cause of the play’s problem, opening up feminist criticism to defend itself.

Feminist readers of the play, like Lisa Jardine, are disgusted at the idea that there is sympathy for Hamlet as a hero and the shift of blame goes to Gertrude (and Ophelia) and Hamlet remains blameless. Of course it is obvious to see Gertrude as the instigator by having an incestuous marriage. Yet, the feminist views this transference as related to cultural dynamics in relation to gender. Because Gertrude speaks the least amount of lines compared with the other major characters in the play, her character is exemplified by the response of the other characters to her. Feminists believe that this interpretation is unfair, and that Gertrude does not deserve the critics’ blame for Hamlet’s confused state of mind.

Hamlet’s disgust with his mother grows from within him. It is because she is so negative to him that explains the excessive emotions he displays. Eliot discusses the Oedipal conflict further in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” and elaborates his concern with the dialectical “correlation” of representation and emotion. But Hamlet’s disgust with his mother is more like the opposite side of the Oedipus complex. Ernest Jones calls it the ‘Ortestes-Nero’, known
as the mother persecution side. Hamlet finds the Nero impulse in him at the end of Act three, scene two, right before he goes into his mother’s chamber. The full sense of his anger isn’t realized until this point in the play.

In T.S. Eliot’s famous essay, *Hamlet and his Problems* (1919), he is more concerned with evaluation than interpretation. He focuses on the play more than on the character of Hamlet and he seems to be in line with the critics of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. He calls the play an artistic failure. “So far from being Shakespeare’s masterpiece, the play is most certainly an artistic failure” (Eliot 789). Although I disagree, he states his reasons, the first being that the play is not consistent. Second, it contains unexplained scenes, and third, the action of the play is in excess of essential emotion. He does elaborate on the third reason, saying that this emotion is “the feeling of a son towards a guilty mother.” He is dominated by an emotion that isn’t very expressible because it exceeds the given facts. He feels that what went wrong was that Shakespeare has not found the objective correlative for this emotion; “…such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately revoked” (Knight). In other words, Hamlet fails because his essential emotion is not linked to the objectification of his emotion, in relation to his mother. I disagree with him. Hamlet’s emotions are directly linked to his objectification. Furthermore,
Hamlet’s actions are directly caused by his feelings regarding his mother’s incestuous marriage.

Eliot believes that there are historical facts presented which the reader is assumed to know. He borrows from critics J.M. Robertson and E.E. Stoll in his argument that Hamlet is a culmination of material from the earlier play of Kyd’s Spanish Tragedy, the lost Hamlet, the tale of Belleforest, and the German version of Hamlet. He claims that the essential emotion cannot be obtained because it comes from material of the older play. He downplays its originality.

Furthermore, other basic questions of Eliot’s theory of evaluation in criticism arise. He seems to assume that evaluation is inherent to criticism. I argue whether evaluation is a necessary key to calling something a work of art. His argument of the play’s artistic failure is deductive and inductive. Eliot’s tunnel vision lacks sight to other possibilities of interpretation. Eliot’s ‘disassociation of sensibility’ is also a hostile reading of Hamlet.

The relevance of the history of Hamlet criticism is certainly very important. But proper interpretation and its function in interpretation of the play is lacking in Eliot’s critique in the way it dismisses Hamlet as not being a work of art. Again, he plays the devil’s advocate in interpreting the play, because he says, “It (Hamlet) is the Mona Lisa of literature” (Eliot 789).
For Eliot, what is wrong with Hamlet becomes what is wrong in *Hamlet*. This leads to the method of criticism as “historical.” Eliot accepts historical facts and makes them relevant to his reason for why he believes the play fails. The application of the “historical method” is explained by J. Dover Wilson in *What Happens in Hamlet*. He says that critics like Eliot, Robertson and Stoll appear to have no aesthetic principles, but seek to explain everything in Shakespeare as being referenced to historical causes. Therefore, when they don’t understand something, they merely label them as “relics of the old play.”

Some of the questions in *Hamlet* can be explained historically, for example, Hamlet’s age. These “historical” critics neglect the problems and difficulties of the play and blame them solely on the need for required historical knowledge. They neglect real history and the curiosity of it.

The only way to explain why T.S. Eliot contradicts himself in the interpretation of the play is to quote the last line of Eliot’s *Hamlet and his Problems*. “We should have to understand things which Shakespeare did not understand himself.” Perhaps this is why Eliot has such a complex interpretation of the play.
Conclusion

The role of Hamlet is ambiguous, and this is the essence of what makes him so fascinating. He is successful as a character because we remember him and we see ourselves in him. My argument leads to the question of whether Hamlet criticism is adequate, clear, and relevant. In an effort to offer a new reading of Hamlet, I conclude that all criticism is relevant, but it is apparent that the nature of criticism is an expression of that individual critic and is directly related to his own scholastic purpose. I hope that I have shown that not all the criticism on Hamlet is adequate or clear in absolute terms.

Johann Wolfgang Goethe said that Shakespeare was a great psychologist and whatever can be known of the heart of man may be found in his plays. There have been many conflicting readings of Hamlet’s character that can make it an arduous task to differentiate what is relevant and what should be dismissed. There is no doubt that the subject of Hamlet’s state of mind has been one of the most controversial and discussed topics in Shakespeare criticism. Hamlet’s mind is so appealing because his ‘madness’ is ambiguous and that is at the heart of this mystery.

We find it hard even with the help of Shakespeare, to fully understand Hamlet. Likewise, Hamlet himself is hopeless in truly understanding himself.
The criticism on *Hamlet* and the interpretation of Hamlet’s psyche, is like a system of mirrors where the same issues of desire, mimesis, Hamlet’s delay and madness are reflected. Each critical view bounces off the preceding one to give us another image of Hamlet, in *Hamlet*, the most talked-about Shakespearean play.
It seems only necessary to begin with Lacanian theory, and to outline some of his key ideas to interpret psychoanalysis and his approach. In 1953 Jacques Lacan was the most influential member of a group that split from the “Societe Psychanalytique de Paris” to form a new group called the “Societe Française de Psychanalytique.” Soon after, the new group was denied affiliation with the National Psychoanalytic Association and Lacan was uninvited to present a paper at a conference in Rome. But Lacan proceeded to go to Rome anyway and present his paper to a group “of his own convocation.” The text appeared in *Ecrits*, titled “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis.” The “Discours” was then given extensive commentary and translated by Anthony Wilden in *The Language of the Self*. It is considered the first statement of what can be named classical Lacanian theory discussing main principles of psychoanalysis, many of which stem from Freud’s writing.

The relation of need, demand, and desire and the relation of desire of the signifier are elaborated throughout the later writings of Lacan. This explanation of need, demand and desire was taken from *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, pp. 185-196.

Jan Kott, in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, and Graham Bradshaw in *Shakespeare Skepticism*, present a broader view on Hamlet’s character flaws, whereas Lacan and Freud base their theory largely on the oedipal theory.

This is found in Sigmund Freud’s ‘The Dissection of the Psychical Personality’, *New Introductory Lectures*, Standard Edition XXII, p.80. Pelican Freud 2, p. 112.

*Hamlet and the Philosophy of Literary Criticism*, by Morris Weitz contains theories from these critics and others including readings by A. C. Bradley and T.S. Eliot.
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