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Tragedy and Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan

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In 1900, Sigmund Freud published *The Interpretation of Dreams*, altering the course of medicine, art, and literature in their relation to the conditions and possibilities of socio-sexual life. *The Interpretation of Dreams* is above all a science of hermeneutics or interpretation, but it also a prose epic and autobiography, in which the hero-author descends into the undiscovered country of the unconscious, using his own memories and dreams to scan the shaping force of repression in the chains of association that measure out human thought. *The Interpretation of Dreams* also institutes psychoanalysis's ongoing reflections on tragedy, for it is here that Freud first published the twinned readings of *Oedipus the King* and *Hamlet* that would become emblematic of the psychoanalytic enterprise more generally. Freud's brief but powerful interpretations of these two plays, taken together and separately, lay out the four fundamental directions that psychoanalytic criticism would take in the next century: character analysis, hermeneutics, genre and narrative structure, and the dynamics of the psychoanalytic situation. In order to indicate the deep affinity and fundamentally literary rationality that links Freudian thought to the history and theory of tragic form, I have mapped these four areas onto categories provided by Aristotle's foundational anatomy of tragedy in the *Poetics*. The psychoanalysis of literary persons takes its bearings from the Aristotelian category of *ethos* or character; psychoanalytic hermeneutics develops the interplay of *lexis* and *dianoia*, or diction and thought, in the *Poetics*; narratology emphasizes the centrality of *mythos* – both plot and myth – in psychoanalysis and tragedy; and the dynamics of the psychoanalytic situation returns both implicitly and explicitly to the function of catharsis as a dramatic therapeutics for Aristotle.[1] Freud's engagement with tragedy is one moment in the constitutive dialogue between tragedy and theory that first assumed a systematic form in Aristotle, a repeated set of encounters that weaves the forms, moods, and shapes of tragedy into the scenes and dreams of Western thought in antiquity and modernity.

These four fundamental concepts represent both the main moments in the history of psychoanalytic criticism since 1900, and a set of continually operative critical

possibilities. *Character criticism* unfolds between the poles of brute personification or impersonation ("putting the character on the couch") and more subtle forms of analysis that respect the fictional being of literary characters. *Hermeneutics* takes the simple form of searching for hidden meanings; in its more elaborate variations, psychoanalytic interpretation follows the operations by which meanings are transformed and redistributed in their passage between conscious and unconscious planes, replacing the search for latent contents with the dynamism of rhetorical transformation. *Narratology* focuses on the structure of dramatic narratives, the storytelling styles of Freud's own writing, and the transformations undergone by tragedy as a genre over time. Finally, approaches that take the *psychoanalytic situation* as their point of orientation try to map key features of the psychoanalytic session and the transferential dynamics of the analyst–analysand relationship onto the text–readet relation, an approach anticipated by Freud's engagement with *Oedipus* and *Hamlet* in his own self-analysis. In the following pages I recover the outlines and interplay of these four directions of psychoanalytic criticism in Freud's inaugural readings of Oedipus and Hamlet, not in order to imply a ptogressive history of increasingly nuanced psychoanalytic approaches to tragedy, but rather to insist on the ongoing urgency of these fundamentally linked vectors of thought, in both their genesis in Freud's early writing and their unfolding in later schools and moments of literary criticism and psychoanalytic theory. I end by suggesting the convergence of both Lacanian psychoanalysis and classical studies of tragedy around the question of citizenship. Not quite a history (of critical approaches), not quite a reading (of *Hamlet* and *Oedipus*), and not quite a theory (of psychoanalytic criticism), this chapter convenes key moments in the psychoanalytic conversation with tragedy in order to invite us to think broadly and generously about both their past and future conjunctions.

Origins

Hamlet and Oedipus first appear in Freud's writings in a letter written to his friend Wilhelm Fliess on October 15, 1897. The first half of the letter in question recollects a scene from Freud's childhood: "I was crying my heart out, because my mother was nowhere to be found. My brother Philipp (who is twenty years older than I) opened a cupboard [*Kasten*] for me, and when I found that mother was not there either I cried still more, until she came through the door, looking slim and beautiful" (Freud 1954: 222). Freud links this poignant but elliptical memory to the fate of an old nurse who had been arrested or "boxed up" (*eingekastelt*) for theft; he was fearful that his mother, too, might disappear forever. (He will later link his mother's reappearance, "slim and beautiful," to her recent pregnancy and confinement [*SE* VI: 51].) Unable to proceed further with the interpretation, Freud then confesses to Fliess that "Only one idea of general value has occurred to me. I have found love of the mother and jealousy of the father in my own case too, and now believe it to be a general phenomenon of early childhood" (223).[2]

As if to bridge the abyss between the intimate enigma of the mother in the cupboard on the one hand and the speculative generalization of its possible meaning on the other, Freud turns fatefully to the example of *Oedipus the King*:

> If that is the case, the gripping power of *Oedipus Rex*, in spite of all the rational objections to the inexorable fate that the story presupposes, becomes intelligible... The Gteek myth seizes on a compulsion which everyone recognizes because he has felt traces of it in himself. Every member of the audience was once a budding Oedipus in phantasy, and this dream-fulfillment played out in reality causes everyone to recoil in horror.

Caught up in this productive train of associations, Freud is next struck by the proximity of *Hamlet* to this scenario: "The idea has passed through my head that the same thing may lie at the root of *Hamlet*." He goes on to roll out a cascade of details in Shakespeare's play that make a new kind of sense when read as expressions of a repressed Oedipal scenario, culminating in the spectacular puppet show of engineered death that ends the drama: "And does not [Hamlet] finally succeed, in just the same remarkable way as my hysterics, in bringing down his punishment on himself and suffering the same fate as his father, being poisoned by the same rival?" (1954: 224).

In the letter to Fliess, Freud takes *Oedipus* and *Hamlet*, in their associative conjunction, as diagnostic mirrors of his own subjective formation, articulating their power at a turning point in his self-analysis. It is no accident that Freud conducts the self-analysis that led him to many of the key formulations published in *The Interpretation of Dreams* in the form of an epistolary exchange: these letters, collected in a volume appropriately entitled *The Origins of Psychoanalysis,* are addressed to a friend and interlocutor who clearly focalizes (often precisely in his noncommittal or unresponsive stance) the powerful structural and affective relationship that Freud would later call "transference." The screen memory in its inchoate particularity only becomes susceptible to analysis via the act of address to another person (Fliess) and the mediation of tragedy (Oedipus/Hamlet), itself a genre organized around the turning point of recognition and reversal.

In *The Interpretation of Dreams,* Freud for the first time links the two heroes in print, disclosing their affinity beyond the intimate circle of friendship and the terrifying semi-privacy of self-analysis:

> Another of the great creations of tragic poetry, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has its roots in the same soil as *Oedipus Rex*. But the changed treatment of the same material reveals the whole difference in the mental life of these two widely separated epochs of civilization: the secular advance of repression in the emotional life of mankind. In the *Oedipus* the child's wishful phantasy that underlies it is brought into the open and realized as it would be in a dream. In *Hamlet* it remains repressed; and – just as in the case of a neurosis – we only learn of its existence from its inhibiting consequences. (*SE* 4: 264)

Here, as in the letter to Fliess, Oedipus enters the scene of Freudian thought just a few steps ahead of Hamlet. Oedipus functions in this couple as the clearer, more primal,

more realized version of the son's infantile wish to marry one's mother and kill's one's father; Hamlet, on the other hand, figures for Freud the repressed and distorted replay of the same scenario, whose motivating function in the drama is evident only negatively, in its "inhibiting consequences." Even before he learns of his father's death from the Ghost, for example, Hamlet is "sullied" by a sense of guiltiness and despair, his outlook colored by a disgusted fascination with his mother's sexuality and a crippling identification not with his idealized father but with the grotesque figure of his uncle, the satyr-king.[3] Freud attributes Hamlet's inability to murder the man who has killed the King and married the Queen not to hypertrophied intellectualism, but rather to the debilitating burden of his own desire to have achieved what Claudius has pulled off: "Hamlet is able to do anything – except take vengeance on the man who did away with his father and took that father's place with his mother, the man who shows him the repressed wishes of his own childhood realized" (*SE* IV: 265).

Freud's initial foray into literary criticism responds to and reflects on the agony and ecsrasy of literary characters. It is the horrifying sight of Oedipus's recognition, and the equally horrifying specter of Hamlet's delay, that rivets the audience, fastening us in the grips of identification. Character criticism was, and, indeed, remains, a necessary first stop in psychoanalytic criticism – a starting point determined not only by Freud's driving concern with the fate of the individual subject, but also by the primacy of *ethos* or character in modern tragedy, an orientation toward individual subjectivity and consistency itself emblematized by the figure of Hamlet. Greek tragedy, as theorized by Aristotle, is a genre governed by the organic machinery of *mythos* or "plot," designating the clean economy of a dramatic action in which the moment of tragic recognition cascades into a series of ironic reversals (Aristotle 1449b–1450b). For Aristotle, who, not like Freud, took *Oedipus the King* as an exemplar of classical tragedy, *ethos* or character was always subordinate to *mythos* or plot. Modern tragedy would, however, give center stage to increasingly complex and compelling characters, a transformation exemplified for many later theorists, critics, and writers by Shakespeare's Hamlet, whose ruminative magnificence is matched only by his chronic disability in the area of dramatic action. In the modern theatre of the ego, Hamlet's fascination with his own subjective extravagance replaces the clarity and objectivity of classical *mythos* (plot) with the libidinal and linguistic interest of *ethos* (character). Since tragedy itself had devolved into a drama of character in the productions of Shakespeare and his Romantic heirs, applying the paradigms of psychoanalysis to characters on stage or page was, as it were, pre-scripted both by the psychoanalytic enterprise itself and by the changes undergone by tragedy as a genre.

Ethos

In the decades following the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud's initial analyses of Oedipus and Hamlet would be extensively excavated, remapped, and

extended by both psychoanalysts and literary critics working in a Freudian vein. In 1949, Ernst Jones devoted an entire book, succinctly entitled *Hamlet and Oedipus,* to the comparative analysis of Freud's odd couple. Critics and analysts also drew other tragic dramas into the circuit of psychic life, especially the *Oresteia*, whose father-loving Electra and mother-hating Orestes offered important variations on the Oedipal theme (e.g., Jung 1915). Hamlet, a young man sent away to school during the period when his mother remarries the man who has killed his father, is certainly closer to Orestes than to Oedipus in his immediate situation. Hamlet's revulsion before the sexuality of his mother, flowering into a death wish against Gertrude that demands constant self-policing by both himself and the Ghost, competes with and overshadows Hamlet's resolve to avenge his father. Moreover, the politics and ethics of revenge are clearly at stake in both the *Oresteia* and in *Hamlet*, but not in *Oedipus the King*.[4] Such comparisons fill out the central Freudian insight, engaging the fuller resources of the classical canon of tragedy in order to fathom the dramatic shape of human motivation and desire. Does this mean that Hamlet has an "Orestes complex," and that Greek tragedy provides an infinite set of templates for mapping human desire? Far from it. In respect to Freud's foundational reading and dialectical mind, Hamlet's mother-hate and father-love is best described as the "negative Oedipus complex," retaining the essential referent to the enunciation of Oedipus in the formative scene of Freud's self-analysis, rather than dissolving the singularity of that initial insight into the sea of vague analogies (with women from Venus and men from Mars) that has become pop-psychoanalysis.

Within the domain of character criticism, the Orestes reference brings forward the importance of the mother in the scene of Hamlet's desire. We might recall here the *Kasten* memory that introduces Freud's initial double reading of *Hamlet* and *Oedipus* under the sign of a deeply unreliable and divided maternity (Lupton and Reinhard 1993: 17–19). The enigmatic box formed by the *Kasten* (box, wardrobe, casket) functions like an illuminated rubric in a medieval manuscript, a concentrated cipher of the discursive text that follows. Although the father in *Hamlet* is most clearly split between obscene and normative figures, the mother, too, is subject to division: is Gertrude the lustful bearer of excessive desire, or is she the pragmatic widow who has taken the best road available to her in a state of emergency? T. S. Eliot formulated the "objective correlative," the equivalence between an object and its affect that, in Eliot's judgment, makes a work of art convincing, in relation to the felt disparity between these two versions of Gertrude: "Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother, but his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her" (25). Jacques Lacan, in his seminar of 1958–9, on "Desire and Its Interpretation," also emphasized the importance of Gertrude in Hamlet's psychic state. According to Lacan, Hamlet is stalled because he is always at "the hour of the Other," playing out even in his final moment of achieved revenge the scripts imposed by Claudius and the Ghost. The true Other of the play in Lacan's reading, however, is not the father in either his ghostly or his obscene instantiations, but rather the mother, who, as the first bearer of nourishment, the agent and object of

primal loss, and the original source of language, occupies the field in which the child's desire is first "alienated" – takes shape, comes into being, but never as its own desire, never as an expression of its own subjective autonomy. Lacan characterizes the dominant linguistic relation between mother and child as one of "demand," the fundamental stance and tone taken by the small child and his caretaker. For Lacan, the incessant demands placed by each on each are always demands for the same thing: not for the toy, or the juice, or the bowel movement, elicited in the painful decibel of the infantile whine or the maternal nag, but rather, in and beyond these objects, the demand for love, for a recognition of absolute value that would magically reinstall the infantile subject in a scene unmarked by the threat of castration or the scandal of the mother's desire (her libidinal distraction by other persons, objects, and activities).

For Lacan, demand stands as an intermediary term between (quasi-biological) need and (thoroughly dialecticized and linguistic) desire. Demand, surging beyond the ache of need into the register of language, borrows its irritating, even exasperating, insistence from the frustration of need, but without symbolizing lack into new forms of mediation and substitution. Gertrude poses a problem to Hamlet because she embodies the purity of demand in its contiguity with need: "His mother does not choose because of something present inside her, like an instinctive voracity. The sacrosanct genital object . . . appears to her as an object to be enjoyed in what is truly the direct satisfaction of a need, and nothing else" (Lacan 1958–9: 12–13). This is, I would insist, the Gertrude of Hamlet's imaginings and not the Gertrude of the play, who, in T. S. Eliot's astute phrase, remains "negative and insignificant"; no Clytemnestra, Gertrude does not provide an adequate referent or "objective correlative" for the intensity of Hamlet's misogynistic revulsion.

Hamlet has been unable to wrest from this imaginary mother the subjective mobility provided by the empty space of desire; "confronted on the one hand with an eminent, idealized, exalted object – his father – and on the other with the degraded, despicable object Claudius, the criminal and adulterous brother, Hamlet does not choose" (1958–9: 12–13). In *Hamlet*, the Oedipal situation, Lacan writes, "appears in the particularly striking form in the real" (51). The subjectivization that Hamlet achieves in the final "interim" of the play, after his abrupt return from his English misadventure, comes about, Lacan suggests, because he has managed to grasp the phallus in its symbolic function: "It is a question of the phallus, and that's why he will never be able to strike it, until the moment when he has made the complete sacrifice – without wanting to, moreover – of all narcissistic attachments, i.e., when he is mortally wounded and knows it" (51). The phallus in its symbolic function is not the obscene, over-present object of Gertrude's imagined desire, but rather, Lacan says, an ordering function of signification: "one cannot strike the phallus, because the phallus, even the real phallus, is a *ghost*" (50). By recognizing the phallus as a symbolic function behind or beyond rather than in or on the king – a feature of his office rather than his physical body – Hamlet is able to achieve a degree of subjective autonomy relative to Gertrude, to Claudius, and to the Ghost. In the final scene of the play, in the interim opened up by his rapidly approaching mortality, Hamlet at the very least

intuits a larger design in his own passivity, wresting some kind of *subjectivity* from the very fact of his *subjection* to the games and commandments of ghosts and counselors, kings and queens. If he is an instrument of Claudius – reduced to a poisoned rapier and a player-recorder in a game of blindman's bluff scripted by the Other – he now conceives of this instrumentalization in terms of a larger symbolic design at work beyond the usurping policies of the satyr-king. And if Hamlet has been trapped in the claustrophobic field of Gertrude's imagined demands, he is able in his final speech to say farewell to her, to separate without further incrimination: "I am dead, Horatio. Wretched Queen, adieu!" (5.2.275). No longer trapped in the specter of her sexual demands, Hamlet may in this final parting accept Gertrude's desire as an indeterminate quantity (does she or doesn't she love Claudius?) rather than a fantasy of realized enjoyment ("honeying and making love / Over the nasty sty," 3.4.92–4). I will return in the final pages of this chapter to the question of the precise nature of the margin of freedom won by Hamlet with respect to the phallus: does the prince of Denmark access the phallus in its relation to the sovereign singularity that marks primal repression and the absolutist state, or does he rather intuit its role in establishing a signifying chain ruled by political and ethical equivalence among members of an emergent body politic?

Hermeneutics

Although Lacan's reading of Hamlet is undeniably an attempt to account for the subjective predicament of the title character, Lacan's emphasis on demand as a certain mode of language identifies a feature of subjectivity that pulses within and beyond the pull of characters and character in the play. Lacan's impact on psychoanalytic criticism would fall much less in the area of character analysis, and much more powerfully in the regions of hermeneutics, narratology, and the dynamics of the psychoanalytic situation. It is significant, for example, that the selection from Lacan's seminar on Hamlet available in English first appeared in a double issue of *Yale French Studies* in 1977, later published as a separate volume entitled *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise* (Felman 1982). For many critics like myself who came of age by coming to terms with the essays collected in this volume, "reading otherwise" meant above all reading for something *other than character*, venturing into fields of literary signification beyond the lure of identification. Indeed, in the original scenes of Freud's conjunction of psychoanalysis and tragedy, we see that Freud is at least as concerned with the techniques of hermeneutics or interpretation as he is with analyzing the characters of Hamlet and Oedipus. In Freud's method of interpretation, manifest contents (what we see, say, or hear in our dreams; the recorded elements of the dream-text itself) carry latent or unconscious meanings, archaic sexual wishes that have been "repressed," rendered unthinkable, by the civilizing processes that forcibly channel the polymorphous perversity of children into the regulated heterosexuality of adulthood. In Freud's scheme, *Oedipus the King*, a play in which the horror of father-death

and mother-love is actually achieved, represents the latent content or repressed meaning that both backlights and inhibits the thoughts and actions of *Hamlet*. This scheme authorized a whole strain of psychoanalytic hermeneutics committed to unlocking the sexual significance of literary images and symbols. At the local level of poetic analysis, this remains a powerful interpretive and pedagogical tool today, not the least because it can be conducted on textual instances – jokes, figures of speech, slips of the tongue; advertisements, images, and product designs – that are easily disengaged from the imaginary coherence of a literary or dramatic character. In Aristotelian terms, psychoanalytic hermeneutics invites the critic to attend to the local play of *lexis* (diction) in its relation to *dianoia* (thought) apart from the march of characters across the stage. A rich bouquet of sexual significations, for instance, animates the fantastic garlands of Ophelia, woven from "crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples, / That liberal shepherds give a grosser name" (5.1.140–1). Although scholars did not need Freud to discover country matters within Ophelia's pretty posies (what are flowers, after all, than the sexual organs of plants?), the psychoanalytic perspective allowed these local instances of sexual punning to inseminate whole networks of image patterns with scenes of seduction, desire, and loss.[5]

The surface-depth model of hermeneutics, already pushed beyond its limits in stress points of Freud's own writing and thinking, underwent extensive revision under the impact of semiotics, structuralism, and poststructuralism – furthered, for example, in the publication of the *Yale French Studies* volume that introduced Lacan's Hamlet to America. These discourses of the sign, which placed a new, counter-hermeneutic emphasis on the rule of the signifier over the signified, of the letter over the spirit, encouraged critics to invert the logical relationship between Oedipus and Hamlet in Freud's original scene of reading tragedy. If interpretation must always begin with surface, is not *Hamlet* rather than *Oedipus* the logically "prior" play, its palimpsest of historical, dramatic, biographical, and editorial versions and variants initiating Freud into the seductive dynamics of repression? In this vein, critics emphasized the importance of the "dreamwork" [*Trauerarbeit*] itself – the forms and mechanisms of substitution and displacement – over the meanings secreted on the far side of the dream (e.g., Weber 1982). A tour de force in this area is Joel Fineman's "The Sound of O in *Othello*"; arguing ingeniously that "Othello," a name apparently of Shakespeare's invention, derives from the Greek *ethelō,* " 'wish,' 'want,' 'will,' 'desire,' " Fineman traces the catastrophic reduction of Othello through the course of the play into a headless subject "inflated with his loss of self" (1991: 148). "The sound of O in *Othello,*" Fineman argued, serves "both to occasion and to objectify in language Othello's hollow self" (151), culminating in his keening cry, "O, Desdemona dead, Desdemona dead, O, O" (5.2.288). Fineman's fearless pursuit of the Greek letter in Shakespeare's text echoes Lacan's aside in the *Hamlet* seminar, "I'm just surprised that no one has pointed out that Ophelia is *O phallus*" (20). Indeed, Fineman's essay was first presented at a 1987 conference devoted to Lacan's *Television*, sponsored by the journals *October* and *Ornicar?*. "The Sound of O" represents a sustained attempt to remain at the level of the letter without relinquishing interest in the drama's

production of what Fineman calls "the subjectivity effect," a formulation that at once recognizes the pull of *ethos* and insists on its life and death in *lexis*.

Mythos

For Aristotle, however, *mythos* was the prime mover of tragedy. *Mythos* can be translated as "plot," but also as "myth"; it designates the structural and temporal element in drama, the architecture of its action. For Freud, *Oedipus the King* staged a fundamental plot of human desire and development, the crystalline clarity of its dramatic action bearing the structural stamp not only of literary art, but also of ritual and archetype. Moreover, Freud compares the diagetic or narrative sequence of *Oedipus the King* to the temporality of a psychoanalysis: "The action of the play is nothing other than the process of revealing, with cunning delays and ever-mounting excitement – a process that can be likened to the work of a psychoanalysis – that Oedipus himself is the murderer of Laïus, but further that he is the son of the murdered man and of Jocasta" (*SE* IV: 261–2). Freud initiates here a comparative analysis of his own narrative techniques that would be picked up in later literary theory and criticism by Peter Brooks, Charles Bernheimer, and others interested in the narrative features shared by psychoanalysis and literature. Claude Lévi-Strauss, following Freud's insight into the formative character of myth, would develop the structuralist approach to narrative, organizing mythic action into symbolic formulae (e.g, the raw and the cooked) that could account for huge areas of cultural life.

The work of Jacques Lacan is once again a major factor in the rise of structuralist approaches to psychoanalysis and tragedy. Like Lévi-Strauss, Lacan is interested in the basic schemata that underlie various subjective configurations and confrontations. Lacan, writes Alenka Zupančič, "treats myth and tragedy themselves as instantiations of formal structures" (171). When Lacan turns to a reading of *Antigone* in his seminar on the ethics of psychoanalysis, conducted a year after his sessions on *Hamlet*, he refers to conversations with Lévi-Strauss on the play. He tells us, "To put it in the terms of Lévi-Strauss – and I am certain that I am not mistaken in evoking him here, since I was instrumental in having had him reread *Antigone* and he expressed himself to me in such terms – Antigone with relation to Creon finds herself in the position of synchrony in opposition to diachrony" (1959–60: 285). In structuralism, synchrony refers to language as system or code, and diachrony to its historical development.[6] Antigone's uncanny location between real and symbolic death, according to Lacan, "suspends everything that has to do with transformation, with the cycle of generation and decay or with history itself, and it places us on a level that is more extreme than any other insofar as it is directly attached to language as such" (285). Antigone suspends diachrony, argues Lacan, by enshrining the irreparable loss of her brother in the barest outlines of a tomb (the pouring of dust on his corpse), a symbolic act that serves to dislodge human being from the temporal flux of both natural and historical change.

Lacan's remarks on *Antigone* center on the moment when Antigone, having sung her own dirge on her road to death, makes the following troubling declaration about the singularity of her brother's case:

> Had I had children or their father dead,
> I'd let them moulder. I should not have chosen
> In such a case to cross the state's decree.
> What is the law that lies behind these words?
> One husband gone, I might have found another,
> Or a child from a new man in first child's place,
> But with my parents hid away in death,
> No brother, ever, could spring up for me.
> (905–12)

The Romantic author Goethe, in his conversation with Eckerman in 1827, was appalled: how could Antigone, the paragon of filial piety, imagine leaving the bodies of her children and husband to rot unburied in the fields (Lacan 1959/60: 255)? Analyzing the intensity of Goethe's reaction, Lacan takes Antigone's declaration as a model of the relation between a chain of signifiers (what he will call S_2, defined by their replaceability in a line of associations and substitutions) and the singular signifier, or S_1, that anchors the shifting meanings of the signifying chain by being itself irreplaceable, not subject to any substitution. Installed by and as trauma, this singular signifier refuses to budge, forming the immovable cornerstone of the fantasmatic architecture of the unconscious. Lacan says of Antigone's declaration that she invokes

> a right that emerges in the language of the ineffaceable character of what is – ineffaceable, that is, from the moment when the emergent signifier freezes it like a fixed object in spite of the flood of possible transformations. What is, is, and it is to this, to this surface, that the unshakeable, unyielding position of Antigone is fixed. (279)

Antigone fastens on her brother as the one immovable element in the world of *philôtes*, the pre-political rituals of reciprocity that encompass the bonds of kinship, friendship, and hospitality. She has defended these bonds in a more global manner up until this point; now she singles the brother out as the one person who cannot be exchanged for another, and in doing so she singles herself out, becoming in Lacan's description similarly "unshakeable" and "unyielding." She speaks for the irreplaceability of her brother, a stance that irrevocably isolates her from the polis, but she does so while also allowing – and here lies the scandal for Goethe – the total exchangeability of other elements in the world of intimate bonds, namely husbands and children. If one point is unmovable, then it is precisely this anchoring point that allows her to release other forms of relation to the regime of equivalence in the polis (cf. Tyrrell and Bennett 1998: 115–17).

When Antigone hangs suspended within the tomb of her live burial, she becomes, as Lacan's structuralist reading suggests, an image of synchrony as such, the structure and field of language that wrestles objects from the flux of temporal transformation by granting them both their fixed and their moveable places in a signifying system. Passing through Freud and Lacan, the synchrony of *mythos* is projected onto the very body and being of Antigone, in three senses. First, she is a figure of suspension and arrest, from her fixation on the singularity of her brother to the hanging of her body in the cave of live burial. Second, Antigone materializes the incestuous union between Oedipus and Jocasta, hence concretizing and concentrating the consequences of the Oedipal plot within the very genealogy and substance of her being. Finally, her refusal of a sexual relation (her choice of the dead Polynices over the living Haemon) links the hollow space of the cave to the uncanny *Kasten* or cupboard of the maternal body as well as to the disquieting question mark of feminine desire (Copjec 2002: 22).

Transference

Lacan associates Antigone with the specter of beauty, which forms a blinding spot within the clarity of the structure of *mythos* in its signifying function:

> The violent illumination, the glow of beauty, coincides with the moment of transgression or of realization of Antigone's *Até* [infatuation, impulse, drive]... it is in that direction that a certain relationship to a beyond of the central field is established for us, but it is also that which prevents us from seeing its true nature, that which dazzles us and separates us from its true function. The moving side of beauty causes all critical judgment to vacillate, stops analysis, and plunges the different forms involved into a certain confusion or, rather, an essential blindness. (1959/60: 281)

Beauty materializes a moment of intense and overwhelming affect, bearing the sublime charge of the real, that accrues at and as the limits of the symbolic structure called myth. Lacan associates the power of Antigone's terrible beauty with the Aristotelian function of catharsis (245–6), which in turn leads us from the formal structure of tragedy to its social and psychological function, and hence from the critical perspectives of character, hermeneutics, and narrative to that of the psychoanalytic situation itself: how, namely, does the staging of tragedy itself institute a kind of psychoanalytic process, resulting in something like a cure? And to what extent does the audience submit to this experience (as patient or analysand) rather than dictate the terms and rhythm of its interpretation (as analyst)? This is not a late question on the scene of criticism, but rather an originary one, insofar as Freud's analysis *of* tragedy was also at the same time his (self)analysis *by* tragedy, conducted in the absent presence of the friend, Wilhelm Fliess.

Hamlet's play-within-a-play stages the transferential effects and potentialities of literature, forming a central cog in what Richard Halpern has provocatively termed the "Hamletmachine" (1977: 227–88), the mechanical reproduction of *Hamlet* in

modernity. Hamlet writes the play for diagnostic purposes, in order to test the veracity of the Ghost by measuring the impact of the re-narrated crime on the purported villain, Claudius. The layering of dramatic versions within the play (dumb show nested in Mousetrap, which is in turn framed by *Hamlet*) figures the layering of analogues, sources, and replays in *Hamlet* and its reception (good and bad quartos, Greek and Senecan reminiscences, Ur-Hamlets and their modern ghosts). These multiple screens trigger not only the drive to interpretation (the hermeneutic impulse) but also the shock of encountering oneself within the scene (the transferential act), a movement, translation, or transfer into the drama that can both hit upon and obscure truths concerning one's subjective position. Claudius is appalled to see his own act in the mirror presented "by one Lucianus, nephew to the King" (III.ii.223). Hamlet, in recognizing Claudius' recognition, is lured into mis-recognizing, or failing to recognize, his own complicity with Claudius' desire. Hamlet, too, is "nephew to the King" and hence bound up in Claudius' guilt. As Jean-François Lyotard has argued, "What this scene offers Hamlet is an alibi: I am Laertes (= I am not Claudius), I must still fulfill the paternal word (= I haven't already fulfilled it by killing Polonius)" (1977: 409). Transference in its imaginary function encourages us to identify with characters at the level of *ethos* or character – the function of pity as com-passion or sym-pathy that forms one strand of catharsis in Aristotle's famous formula. Transference in its symbolic and real dimensions, however, locates us in contradictory places within the *mythos* of the drama, and the *mythos* of our lives, corresponding to the fear or terror that wrenches us out of imaginary identification with a character and forces us into contact with the unconscious plot and repressed words that shape our desire.

Lacan writes of the terrifying image of Antigone: "through the intervention of pity and fear... we are purged of everything of that order. And that order, we can now immediately recognize, is properly speaking the order of the imaginary. And we are purged of it through the intervention of one image among others" (1959–60: 247–8). The fascinating image of Antigone, like the specter of Lucianus that takes shape in the hall of mirrors constituted by Hamlet's play-within-a-play, leads us both in and through the drama, transferring our subjective interest across competing positions and levels of meaning in the play, in order to rearrange or shake up our unconscious knowledge. As such, catharsis and/as transference involves a certain bringing-into-action or subjective effectuation of the formal dimensions of character, plot, and language.

Psychoanalysis and Citizenship

Where do psychoanalytic studies of tragedy stand today? Although Lacan's approach to psychoanalysis builds in part on structuralist conceptions of language, kinship, and social order, in French classical studies, the structuralist approach to myth and tragedy would develop largely apart from psychoanalysis, culminating in the work of Marcel

Detienne, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, and Jean-Pierre Vernant, their student Nicole Loraux, and English and American scholars such as Charles Seaford, Froma Zeitlin, Charles Segal, William Tyrell, and Larry Bennett. The political anthropology of Greek tragedy has used the resources of myth criticism to uncover the tension in Greek tragedy between the myths of the great aristocratic houses, marked by self-destructive crises of incest and familiacide, and the new institutions of citizenship on the other, which smashed the charisma of authority based on kinship in order to reorganize political life in terms of the equivalences of citizenship. My final question is the following: can the *political anthropology of citizenship* and the *psychoanalysis of kinship* be brought together productively in new readings of tragedy?

At first glance, citizenship and psychoanalysis would appear to have little to say to each other. Psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on the singularity of subjectivity, the force of fantasy, and the unsettling effects of desire and enjoyment, presents itself as the inverse and underside of citizenship, with its normative presentation of the public life and juridical definition of persons. The word "citizen" does not appear in the General Index to the *Standard Edition* of Freud, nor does it figure in any substantial way in the teaching of Lacan. Yet the two discourses can be joined around the dialectic between subjective alienation in the symbolic order (the institution of norms) and subjectivizing separation from symbolic systems (the taking exception to norms that forms the action of many tragedies, notably *Antigone*). Moreover, psychoanalysis and citizenship are drawn together *by, in and as the field of drama itself*, in its dialectic between the family and the polis and between ancient and modern forms of tragic narrative. New work by Lacanian theorists, especially those in the "Slovenian School" associated with Slavoj Žižek as well as critics affiliated with the journal *October* (e.g., Joan Copjec) have developed the political implications of psychoanalysis for this new century. Much of this work has been conducted via structuring references to *Antigone*, *Hamlet*, and other works of tragedy from the canon of psychoanalysis, often juxtaposed with examples from film and new media in order to focalize the ongoing cogency of tragic scenes and dreams whose formative function cannot be dissolved into the multiplicity and relentless particularism of "culture."

In Ernesto Laclau's account of hegemony (1996), the war of individual interests coalesces around points of social identification – whether sent from above, in the fictions of unity authored by the state, or emanating from below, in the struggles of individual groups (the poor, religious minorities, immigrant groups, and so on). In the very intensity of their particularism, such struggles have the capacity to galvanize the disparate interests of others, achieving a provisional universality around a broadened roster of citizenship. Yet such moments of signification remain contradictory and inadequate, rendering the social forever unstable, always an incomplete mapping of the field it attempts to master. Posing the question of psychoanalysis and citizenship does not mean applying a universal form of explanation (Lacan) to a local instance (be it to Athenian, Elizabethan, or Stalinist political culture), but rather mobilizing within citizenship itself the dialectic of the particular and the universal, the specific case of citizenship and the impulses toward both normative expression and internal

critique immanent within citizenship as a discourse. The difference made by psychoanalysis is to insist on the singular place of sexuality, desire, and enjoyment in shaping both the exploitative and the utopian dimension of every social arrangement, including democratic ones; again and again, citizenship comes up against the differences made by gender, kinship, and cultic forms of group identity in attempting to fashion a world that founds itself on their neutralization, equalization, or disremption.

With these possibilities in mind, let us revisit our earlier comparison of *Hamlet* and the *Oresteia*. Both the *Agamemnon* and *Hamlet* begin with scenes of a night watch, commanded by a royal household in a state of sovereign transition. In both cases, the night watch is dramatized as a sequence or rotation that evokes the signifying chain as such. In the opening scene of Aeschylus' trilogy, a relay of lights, what we might call a pure sequence of signifiers, transmits the message of Agamemnon's imminent return from the ruins of Troy all the way to Argos. In the opening of *Hamlet*, the changing of guards on the ramparts of Elsinore establishes equivalence among the young men who take turns guarding the castle; they too form a kind of signifying chain or relay race of transferred duties. We might say that both plays are divided between hierarchical structures based on the family triangle, with the child placed beneath and outside a parental couple in a state of emergency; and horizontal structures based on social equivalence (the band of brothers, the circle of friends, the chain of signifiers). The family triangle is anchored by the sublime singularity of the Father, identified with the symbolic function of the phallus; in relation to this evacuated slot, Orestes and Hamlet must figure out how, if at all, to assume a relation to the phallus. Over against the despotic singularity of sovereignty, and set into motion by the very fragility and crisis suffered by the paternal function, flows the sequence of equivalence, laying out a horizontal plane of action and interaction, and of possible subjectivization.

Orestes will go on to avenge his father by killing his mother and her lover. Although he achieves this deed at the end of the second play, the result is subjective catastrophe: the son is driven mad and into exile by a swarm of Furies, archaic goddesses of blood-right and the aristocratic rule of kinship, who revisit the rage of the dead mother on her son. As spirits of vengeance, the Furies represent the threat of an ongoing legacy of perpetual guilt and reciprocal violence. Resolution is found in Athens, on the Areopagus, site of the future high court of Athens, where Athena oversees a trial of Orestes. Ten jurors are assembled to deliver their judgments, recalling in their formal parity the relay of lights that opens the trilogy. Athena breaks the tie among the ten, inserting the continuing necessity of a singular moment of sovereignty within the new constitutional order. Although Orestes has been exonerated, the trial transfers adjudication of murder from the family to the court. At the end of the trilogy, a certain passage has been effected from aristocratic kinship to constitutional citizenship, but not without retaining in reserve a founding moment of sovereign violence, preserved in the tragic mythoi of the House of Atreus and visualized in the domesticated but still vital presence of the Furies, now transformed into the "Eumenides" or "Kindly One" of the third play's title and given cultic place next the court.

The Denmark of Shakespeare's Hamlet is, of course, no Athens, and constitutional conditions and outcomes hang very far on the horizon indeed. Nonetheless, the comparison with the *Oresteia* allows us to bring forward several features that bear on citizenship, from the night watch that opens the play to the circle of friendship that ends it. Hamlet's Denmark is an elective monarchy, representing a certain hybrid between absolutist and constitutional frameworks. In his last moments, Hamlet gives his "dying voice" to Fortinbras and "prophesies his election." He turns, that is, to the phalanx of doubles and foils – Horatio, Laertes, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Fortinbras – that have assembled around him in the course of the drama. If Hamlet has, in Lacan's reading from 1958–9, claimed a new freedom with respect to the phallus at the end of the play, the phallic function, I would argue, orients him more toward the horizontal scene of friendship (and hence of proto-citizenship) than toward the singularity of the sovereign position held by the dead father. We might note here that "prince" comes from the Latin "princeps," meaning "first"; in Roman law, *princeps* meant "first citizen," and it came to designate the emperor's nominal relation to the constitutional order of the Republic that remained officially in effect long after its actual eclipse. Hamlet is, from the beginning to the end of the play, the "Prince" of Denmark: does this mean he is always a little less than a sovereign, enunciating a principle of One, but in miniature and in minority, or is he rather the "first Citizen," the first in a row of equals in a civic order, who nonetheless lays claim to a quotient of exceptional sovereignty, in the form of achieved subjectivity?

In electing Fortinbras, Hamlet, I would argue, does not choose his own successor (one sovereign choosing another in a conservative enunciation of elective monarchy; Schmitt 1956), but rather speaks for the body politic, called to give its minimal consent to the person of the new king. At the end of *Hamlet*, the monarchy remains a monarchy, and a brutalized and debased one at that, in the hands of a new prince who is more thug than scholar, more dictator seizing the occasion of emergency than anointed king in an orderly succession. Yet, as Christopher Pye has argued, the "interim" claimed by Hamlet as his own ("It will be short; the interim's mine," 5.2.73) becomes an opening for subjectivity. In and through this interim, Hamlet transforms the passivity of delay within the endless cycle of revenge into the activity of an anticipatory deadline, a call to action that allows the prince to become a subject: "The 'interim' that Hamlet speaks of is the split and pause that haunt the male revenger's act, now miraculously transformed into the enabling measure of his life" (Pye 1999: 112). Hamlet, not unlike Orestes, passes through but also out of the modality of revenge, discovering something like citizenship on the other side of reciprocal violence. The subjectivizing "interim" marked by the act and fact of election orients Hamlet in a sequence of equivalent figures, his foils and doubles, his friends and his successors. Hamlet's final words announce not his accession to some form of kingship in the moment of death, but rather his passage into the chain of friendship that will survive Hamlet and take up his story: "Horatio, I am dead. / Thou liv'st. Report me and my cause aright / To the unsatisfied" (5.2.280–2).

The Hamlet–Horatio couple is minimally anticipated in the friendship between Orestes and Pylades, which we might in turn transfer, with some caution, to the friendship between Freud and Fliess. If Hamlet is the object and mirror of our imaginary fascination, Horatio directs the symbolic dimension of our subjective capture within the scenes before us. Moreover, a remnant of the classical chorus, Horatio performs this work in the mode of public opinion formation, testing, evaluating, and summarizing the state of the union throughout the drama, but always against the backdrop of unconscious knowledge (including the textual variants, generic transformations, and classical recollections gathered up by *Hamlet* as an instance of modern tragedy). As such, Horatio is another figure for us, the audience, not a *princeps* or First Citizen like Hamlet, functioning at the head of the signifying chain, but rather situated discreetly within the devolution of both public reason (*or-ratio*) and unconscious knowledge, a figure of normative consciousness within the play, between the play and its audience, and in the constitution of tragedy as a genre with a history, that is, a shifting set of aesthetic norms.

Recall Hamlet's cosmic musings: "this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours" (2.2.300–4). To the excellent canopy of the Globe Hamlet opposes a fundamentally social term: the foul *congregation* of vapors. "Congregation" – social yet not national, a body without a politic – evokes here the new forms of association emerging in Shakespeare's plays and in Shakespeare's time. If Hamlet's margin of subjectivity is "sovereign," this hard-won sovereignty is not based on kingship and kinship, but rather, I would argue, on friendship in both its socio-sexual ambiguity and its emancipatory promise (as *philadelphia*, brotherly love). In this analysis, Hamlet's final moments on stage cast the drama not simply as a mourning play, but also as a modern play. This modernity, however, is native to tragedy itself. For does not every tragedy (if not every work of art) instantiate the passage from a collective to an individual moment, from pre-Oedipal to Oedipal formations, from an archaic economy to a system of exchange, from the anonymity of religious ritual to some new form of expression, founding in each case the possibility of modernism even in the depths of antiquity? We might point here to the Homeric exodus from the domestic economy of the aristocratic household to the possibility of the political at the very end of the *Odyssey*, the same passage re-marked and formalized in the *Oresteia*, which definitively positions Athenian tragedy between ritual and democracy, and between kinship and citizenship. Such forms are radically new because radically contingent, yet, like any authentic beginning (including the beginning made by Freud in his letter to Fliess on October 15, 1897), they instantiate the eternal recurrence of the same: moments of genuine creation that build synapses between epochal moments and hence ground the narratives of history that close around them.

Notes

1 Missing from this scheme is the authorial approach; because it is not a significant feature of the Aristotelian graphing of tragedy, I have omitted it from this account of tragedy and psychoanalysis.

2 This letter has received extensive analyses; see, for example, Swan (1974) and Bröser (1982).

3 See Hamlet's first soliloquy, 1.2.129–59; for an analysis of the soliloquy in terms of Oedipal guilt, see Lupton (2001: 146).

4 On Shakespeare's possible access to Aeschylus, see Schleiner (1990).

5 On the sexuality of Shakespeare's language outside a psychoanalytic perspective, see Partridge (1948) On Freud and the language of flowers, see Lupton (1996).

6 See Ducrow and Todorov (1979: 137): "A linguistic phenomenon is said to be *synchronic* when all the elements and factors that it brings into play belong to one and the same moment of one and the same language. It is *diachronic* when it brings into play elements and factors belonging to different states of development of a single language."

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