Recebido em: 09/10/2015 Publicado em: 21/12/2016

EVIL, SOLILOQUIES AND THE DILACERATED INDIVIDUAL IN *HAMLET*

O MAL, OS SOLILÓQUIOS E O INDIVÍDUO DILACERADO EM *HAMLET*

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Resumo: Este artigo tem por objetivo analisar a questão do Mal e a construção e simbolismo dos solilóquios em *Hamlet* a partir de um exame do enredo e da disposição dos personagens na peça. Ele aborda os solilóquios a partir de uma análise da linguagem, assim como um enfoque filosófico e psicanalítico da obra em questão. Uma conexão é traçada entre os solilóquios, o uso espontâneo da linguagem e o processo natural de sonhar, tendo em vista autores como Freud, Hegel e Foucault.

Palavras-chave: Literatura Inglesa. *Hamlet*. Solilóquios. Mal. Psicanálise.

Abstract: This article aims to analyze the question of Evil and the construction and symbolism of soliloquies in Hamlet by examining the plot and disposition of the characters in this play. It deals with soliloquies through an analysis of language, as well as a philosophical and psychoanalytical approach of the play. A connection is traced between soliloquies, the spontaneous use of language and the natural process of dreaming, bearing in mind authors such as Freud, Hegel and Foucault.

Keywords: English Literature. Hamlet. Soliloquies. Evil. Psychoanalysis.

1 Hamlet's Predicament

In his article "Money Man", Michael Neill addresses the different driving forces that gradually led Shakespeare to give up acting and concentrate on his career as a playwright, creating ever more elaborated and in-depth tragedies. Convolution, however, was not for its own sake, but rather used as a means to craft a new form of drama which would be able to convey psychological depth, the dilemma of action and the intricacies of a sophisticated plot.

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Drawing from Shapiro's *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* and Bart van Es's *Shakespeare in Company*, the author argues, quoting Shapiro's book, that The Globe was a theatre for playwrights and not actors in which,

> Shakespeare would enjoy the professional security that allowed him to develop a new kind of audience, a 'regular, charmed clientele', for whom he could write 'increasingly complicated plays that dispensed with easy pleasures and made [...] playgoers work harder than they had ever worked before'. (NEILL, 2014, p. 7).

Neill goes on to state that Shapiro's biographical book attempts to trace Shakespeare at work rather than Shakespeare in love, and that "Bart van Es's *Shakespeare in Company* sets out to trace Shakespeare's career through his relationships with the theatrical companies for which he wrote". (NEILL, 2014, p. 7) According to Neill, what prompted Shakespeare to write ever more sophisticated and psychologically profound plays with striking soliloquies[3] was not a stroke of genius or a purely poetic flair inspired by contingencies. Rather, he was impelled by a competitive environment where he had to survive and stand out among his rivals. Ultimately, William Shakespeare was also prompted by the financial reward that living up to the expectations of his audience, readers and companies for a high standard of quality entailed. Neill affirms that "catering for the popular tastes of playhouse audiences was something he, like many of his playwright contemporaries, might well have regarded with disdain." (NEILL, 2014, p 7) and that "for Shakespeare − at least for as long as he followed the usual practice of offering his talents to any company willing to pay − playmaking was essentially jobbing work." (NEILL, 2014, p. 7).

According to Bart van Es, Shakespeare's control over casting allowed for the creation of the most remarkable new feature of his work in the company period, which was the creation of psychological depth in his characters. He argues that this psychological depth can be evidenced not only in monologues and soliloquies but also in the animated interplay between characters. In this context, Neill states that soliloquies express the conscience of a character and are related to the idea of the individual, a concept that emerges in the Modern Age.

> Neither Webster nor the more prolific Middleton could match the range of Shakespeare's psychological invention. In the third phase of his career, when, as a

[3] Soliloquies correspond to the moment a character speaks to himself/herself or to the audience when no one else is present in the scene and only the reader, or the audience, can read or listen to them. Therefore, some soliloquies represent an inner monologue while others are addressed to the audience. In Shakespeare's plays, soliloquies express the conscience of a character and are related to the idea of the individual, a concept that emerges in the Modern Age.

> housekeeper, his position in the Chamberlain's Men became more powerful, he was able to develop this talent in even more striking ways. (NEILL, 2014, p. 7).

One of Shakespeare's most famous work of art of the company period, *Hamlet* can be considered his most philosophical play. Through its appreciation of the human being and the constant tension between life and death, one is confronted with themes such as one's own conscience, the predicament of action, incest, revenge, dreams and moral dilemmas that are borderline with psychological torments and personal dramas. *The Tragedy of Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark* (here referred to simply as *Hamlet*) has its plotline taken from previous sources, which reach back to *Amleth*, written by Saxo Grammaticus in the 12th century and telling about a story concerning the times of Old Viking Denmark. In spite of that, as it usually happened with Shakespeare, there was a tacit understanding among the audience that things should be taken according to the social conventions of Elizabethan times.

In *1599: A year in the life of William Shakespeare*, James Shapiro states that,

> There are many ways of being original. Inventing a plot from scratch is one of them and never held much appeal for Shakespeare. Aside from the soliloquies, much of Shakespeare's creativity went into the play's verbal texture. In writing *Hamlet* Shakespeare found himself using and inventing more words than he had ever done before. His vocabulary, even when compared to those of other great dramatists, was already exceptional. The roughly 4,000 lines in the play ended up requiring nearly the same number of different words (for comparison's sake, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and *The Jew of Malta* each use only about half that number). (SHAPIRO, 2010, p. 320).

As regards the plot, the play starts with the already perceived presence of the ghost of King Hamlet, the father. Alien and innocuous to all the other characters who try to approach it through speech, it discloses itself only to his son Hamlet in Act 1, scene 5, summoning him to revenge his unnatural murder (through poison, by his brother Claudius, who is now just married to Queen Gertrude, the ghost´s widow and Hamlet´s mother). Claudius is now through his marriage to the Queen, the new king of Denmark.

The ghost in *Hamlet* plays a role equivalent to that of the witches in *Macbeth.* Technically, by being presented in the first act of the play, it helps in grasping and keeping the attention of the audience. Psychologically, ghost and witches stand for things which are not only uncertain and supernatural, but also tormenting and deviating. Both agents in these plays serve to question the *status quo* or what lies underneath the order of things, and which is usually taken for granted as an unquestionable fact by many. Thus, through a certain perspective, they set the tone of these plays and foreshadow much of what is to come and to be developed throughout the plot. Hamlet's father's ghost also reflects and corresponds, in a

symbolical way, to Hamlet's internal ghosts. In Elizabethan times people were superstitious, and respected ghosts and witches as belonging to the realm of magic. BENNET; ROYLE refer to a list of 13 uncanny things, one of them being,

> Ghosts. In some ways, perhaps, this is the uncanny *par excellence*. The notion of the ghost unsettles all distinctions between being alive and being dead, the real and the unreal, the familiar and the unfamiliar. A ghost is the very embodiment of strange repetition or recurrence: it is a revenant, it *comes back*. (BENNET; ROYLE, 2009, p. 39) .

However, unlike *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* focuses on one individual faced with evil when a range of possible actions can be pursued. Hamlet does not surrender to evil like Macbeth and his wife, even though he is a white-livered character in many aspects who is torn between the demands of his father's ghost and his own thoughts and conscience in relation to taking action. In *Hamlet*, we are faced with an individual's quest to understand evil and battle against it without having to give in to it. In this sense, it is important to take into account that, according to Irving Ribner, in "The Pattern of Growth: *Hamlet*", in his attempt to understand and confront evil, Hamlet ends up conforming to the Christian precepts of a moral order. Nevertheless, he also states that in his complexity Hamlet stands for all men" (RIBNER, 1971, p. 82) and concludes that "to view Hamlet as merely the case study of an individual is to belittle the genius of Shakespeare and to slight his artistry". (RIBNER, 1971, p. 90)

Hamlet's legendary soliloquy in Act 3, scene 1 opens up to various considerations,

> To be or not to be: that is the question:
> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
> Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
> And by opposing end them. To die, to sleep −
> No more − and by a sleep to say we end
> The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
> That flesh is heir to! 'Tis a consummation
> Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep −
> To sleep − perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub,
> For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
> When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
> Must give us pause. There's the respect
> That makes calamity of so long life:
> For who would bear the whips and scorns of time
> Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
> The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
> The insolence of office, and the spurns
> That patient merit of th unworthy takes,
> When he himself might his quietus make
> With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,

To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country, from whose bourn,
No traveller returns, puzzles the will.
And makes us rather bear those ills we have,
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment,
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action. (*Hamlet*, Act III, Sc. 1)

The first consideration is the very nature of dreaming and its relationship to our life, unconscious desires and conflicts and subconscious forebodings. The fact that we do not have any conscious control over our dreams "To sleep − perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub, For in that sleep of death what dreams may come When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, Must give us pause." points to all the processes (whether internal or external) that somehow contradict our conscious will and creep into our rational decisions: the things which happen, so to speak, in spite of our control and awareness. It is therefore through dreaming that we have a nonphysical *locus* or the possibility of a symbolic world where mixed feelings and contraries can come together and contradictions are able to subvert formal logic.

Moreover, our sensory and intuitive knowledge, as opposed to our rational knowledge, oftentimes contradicts our conscious calculation and discursive understanding and is most apparent in dreams and subconscious premonitions. It is therefore through the act of dreaming, and a certain spontaneous use of language, that we can create a bridge between our unconscious conflicts and desires and our vigilant awareness. This consideration also leads us to the question of the overlapping between fantasy and the phantasm, both of which can take us to a framework of phantasmagoria capable of diverting ourselves from the straightforward path we usually want to trace or follow to achieve our goals. It becomes quite evident that that soliloquy in *Hamlet*, and by extension other soliloquies in Shakespearean tragedies, function as a catalyser of one's own conscience and the moral dilemmas we are faced with in real life, such as the question of evil coming from the outward world or even inside ourselves. It is in this sense that soliloquies and dreams have so much in common: both deal with things that are tormenting us by condensing thought in a few key elements that would be meaningless by themselves.

It would be interesting, therefore, to resume here the more fluid and contemporary concept of subject by following the line of thought of Pandolfo, when she uses the term,

> […] in the sense of the always implicated and transactional "I" of psychoanalysis and linguistics, and not as an autonomous and self-mastering subject of consciousness, or as an interiority that would be the private space of individual perception. It is a subject inscribed in a network of symbolic debts, and defined in relation to that Other Scene Freud and Lacan call the unconscious; a subject that speaks through the unmastered realms of dreaming, the *lapsus* or the joke, and manifests itself fugitively − an opening of shutters that immediately close up. (PANDOLFO, 1998, p. 4-5).

The well-known fact that Hamlet is, among other things, contemplating suicide and its consequences in this passage, also raises some questions. Hamlet is aware that the consequence of suicide is that the person who commits it will no longer be there to experience reality and feel the good things that life could offer, as well as the fact that any action taken always has a consequence. Therefore, he starts this soliloquy with "To be or not to be: that is the question" and concludes, more to the end that "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all", overlaying "the pale cast of thought" over "the name of action". To be or not to be, in this case, could also be interpreted as to act or not to act, doing what his father's ghost demands of him, i.e., to kill his uncle Claudius, as well as to live or not to live.

However, Hamlet is well aware that to be is not always the easiest decision. It certainly is the best choice to relieve his conscience regarding his father's demands and the fact that, as the play unfolds, everything points to Claudius as actually being the culprit and an evil and manipulative man. Also, Gertrude's connivance to Claudius and his crime becomes a strong possibility as the plot unravels. Nevertheless, once Hamlet makes the decision to be, he is faced with all kinds of difficulties and obstacles. Subterfuges and shortcuts just make things more difficult for him and end up messing up his predicament and difficult position in the play even more.

Firstly, he ends up accidentally killing Polonius, while the old man is eavesdropping behind the curtain on the conversation he is having. Secondly, he is also indirectly responsible for Ophelia's suicide in the river and, subsequently, for Laertes' suffering for having lost both his father and his sister in a suspicious manner. Braunmuller argues about Laertes' attempts to warn Ophelia against Hamlet, that "by joining sexuality with politics father and brother point us to one of the play's most important though sometimes overlooked concerns: succession to the throne." (BRAUNMULLER, 2001, p. xliv) He also argues that "just as political demands trap Hamlet, so political and patriarchal constraints control Ophelia's choices and set her on the path to frustration, madness and suicide". (BRAUNMULLER, 2001, p. xliii) It is well-known by the context of the play that, whether willingly or unwillingly, Ophelia ends up being used by Claudius and Polonius as a decoy for Hamlet. Braunmuller also argues that,

being a royal figure, Hamlet is not free to follow his personal desires because he risks public disaster, i.e., ruining his public image. Inversely, he argues, every royal figure's personal desire is also a political stance.

All the aspects above mentioned end up reflecting on the construction of soliloquies in *Hamlet*, where one feels the burden of a conscience trying to deal with difficult deadlocks concerning taking action in complicated situations, and its possible consequences. In this sense, the following passage by Shapiro from the chapter "Essays and soliloquies" contributes in that,

> The sense of inwardness that Shakespeare creates by allowing us to hear a character as intelligent as Hamlet wrestle with his thoughts is something that no dramatist had yet achieved. He had written memorable soliloquies from early on in his career, but powerful as these were, even they fall far short of the intense self-awareness we find in Hamlet's. (SHAPIRO, 2010, p. 328).

The same author also points out that Hamlet's mind is devastated by conflicts that he cannot solve and that "maybe the great secret of the soliloquies is not their inwardness so much as their outwardness, their essay-like capacity to draw us into an intimate relationship with the speaker and to see the world through his eyes." (SHAPIRO, 2010, p. 334) It is important to bear in mind that some soliloquies in Shakespeare serve to justify oneself so as to appease conscience, whereas others are simply a cry from the heart or a way to get things off one's chest. Therefore, inasmuch as *Macbeth* elaborates on the twists and turns of the soul enacted by a number of key characters and through the use of soliloquies and private dialogues to appease conscience, *Hamlet* plays out to a maximum degree the risks and benefits of over thinking, epitomized by one character, as something diametrically opposed to rash actions and acting without thinking, which also happens in the play.

1.1 Life, Death and Sexuality in Hamlet

Act 5 scene 1 takes place in a graveyard and illustrates, through Hamlet's conversation with Horatio and the gravediggers, a single individual's attempt to come to terms with death and our finite existence. Hamlet's rather theoretical approach to death: "To what base uses may we return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till 'a find it stopping a bunghole?" (*Hamlet*, Act V. Sc. 1) is contrasted by Horatio's more realistic and down-to-earth response: "'T'were to consider too curiously, to consider so." (*Hamlet*, Act V, Sc. 1) Likewise, Hamlet's seriousness concerning death and his genuine surprise at seeing the gravedigger singing in the grave makes him exclaim: "Has this fellow no feeling of his

business? 'A sings in gravemaking." (*Hamlet*, Act V, Sc. 1) and prompts the following dialogue,

> HAMLET: Whose grave's this, sirrah?
> CLOWN: Mine, sir.
> HAMLET: I think it be thine indeed, for thou liest in't.
> CLOWN: You lie out on't, sir, and therefore 'tis not
> yours. For my part, I do not lie in't, yet it is mine.
> HAMLET: Thou dost lie in't, to be in it and say it is
> thine. 'Tis for the dead, not for the quick, therefore thou liest.
> CLOWN: 'Tis a quick lie, sir; 'twill away again from
> me to you. (*Hamlet*, Act V, Sc. 1)

Thus, Hamlet's seriousness and offense at being played about by the gravedigger is eclipsed by a more joking and pragmatic view of death held by someone, according to Horatio, whose "Custom has made it in him a property of easiness." (*Hamlet*, Act 5, Sc. 1). This dialogue also contains a pun on the double sense of the word lie in that context, which can either mean to tell an untruth or to lie on the floor alive or dead.

Other important issues that come to surface in the first scene of Act Five are exemplified in the following dialogue,

> HAMLET: ... How long hast thou been a gravemaker?
> CLOWN: Of all the days i' th' year, I came to't that
> day that our last king Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.
> HAMLET: How long is that since?
> CLOWN: Cannot you tell that? Every fool can tell
> that. It was that very day that young Hamlet was born
> − he that is mad, and sent into England.
> HAMLET: Ay, marry, why was he sent into England?
> CLOWN: Why, because 'a mad. 'A shall recover his wits
> there; or, if 'a do not, 'tis no great matter there.
> HAMLET: Why?
> CLOWN: 'Twill not be seen in him there. There
> the men are as mad as he.
> HAMLET: How came he mad?
> CLOWN: Very strangely, they say.
> HAMLET: How strangely?
> CLOWN: Faith, e'en with losing his wits.
> HAMLET: Upon what ground?
> CLOWN: Why, here in Denmark. I have been sexton
> here, man and boy, thirty years.
> (*Hamlet*, Act V, Sc. 1)

That exchange puts together the questions of madness, unconscious material and implicit sexuality. The gravedigger speaks to Hamlet about Hamlet without knowing that he is actually speaking to Hamlet. Therefore, he feels comfortable to express his inner thoughts and the information he has about Hamlet freely and forthrightly. Hamlet, on the other hand, is

acutely aware that he is being talked about, as well as of the clown's unawareness about whom he is speaking to. Instead of detaining the clown, Hamlet questions and prods him, eliciting his answers and demanding him to elucidate them.

What is it, then, that is both cryptically inscribed in the clown's words and symbolized by the references to England and Denmark? According to the gravedigger, Hamlet was sent to England because he had lost his wits, i.e., had become mad, which in fact is what more-or-less happens in the play. One possible interpretation of the use of the word wits in this passage is that it refers to both his critical ability to reason and also, through a double reading, to his courage or ability to deal with his problems in a manly way. In other words, the latter sense of the word wits can be interpreted as referring to his balls or sexual organ.

Since England is an island isolated from the rest of the European Continent by water, it could be interpreted as being used there to stand for a place of refuge where the "men are as mad as he", i.e., where madness and sexuality are not put at stake or even perceived properly by others. Meaning that for those who have gone mad, like Hamlet and Lady Macbeth, for example, England can be read as a country symbolically longed for, although it is always threatened by more "tumultuous" countries like Denmark or Scotland. Also, the fact that Hamlet was sent to England enabled him to see and analyse the situation in Denmark from outside and return more mature.

Moreover, England stands symbolically for everything that is insular in a person or character and therefore can only be reached through water, i.e., through indirect ways and an emotional approach in a free interpretation. At the same time, being the epicentre of a foggy island in the northern hemisphere of the globe, it preserves a mystical if not magical halo, both in real as well as in symbolic terms. Just as its real location and geography may have an influence on the way it comes to be perceived, historical periods also affected the way it perceives and relates to others. The Elizabethan historical period with, among other things, the pillaging in the seas by corsairs encouraged by the Crown behind the scenes, and the subsequent creation of the British Empire, may have shaped consciously or unconsciously (and from a certain perspective) the metropolitan approach England and English people in general have in relation to the rest of the world.

The last part of the dialogue between Hamlet and the gravedigger concentrates in an unconscious experience that is brought to Hamlet's mind by a skull that serves as a reminder of mortality,

> CLOWN: Here's a skull that hath lien you in the earth three and twenty years.
> HAMLET: Whose was it?
> CLOWN: A whoreson mad fellow's it was. Whose do you think it was?
> HAMLET: Nay, I know not.
> CLOWN: A pestilence on him for a mad rogue! 'A poured a flagon of Rhenish on my head once. This same skull, sir, was, sir, Yorick's skull, the King's jester.
> HAMLET: This?
> CLOWN: E'en that.
> HAMLET: Let me see. [*Takes the skull*] Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath borne me on his back a thousand times. And now how abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now? Your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table in a roar? Not one now to mock your own grinning? Quite chapfall'n? Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favor she must come. (*Hamlet*, Act V, Sc. 1)

At the end of this dialogue one realizes that "young Hamlet" is thirty years old at the time this conversation is taking place. It also becomes evident that he has gathered and processed enough experience throughout life, and lately through suffering, thus becoming more mature than he was at the beginning of the play. Likewise, it becomes somehow evident that life and death are not completely distinct things, as well as the fact that one wouldn't exist or make sense without the other. Rather, they walk hand in hand from the beginning of our existence and cannot be completely set apart.

Hamlet deals with the philosophical implications of death and the fact that as human beings we are the only animals aware of the fact that we will die. The empirical and painful consequences of dying are therefore aggravated by the knowledge that one day we and our lives will cease to exist forever. This element of philosophical speculation and dread is less present in *Macbeth*, for example, which is also a philosophical but nevertheless more diffuse play. There, death appears rather as a game of chance from which people may or may not survive, without measuring and weighing so much its consequences and the fear that it entails on the individual level. It is also a play where death is felt more collectively and the action usually happens at night, with nefarious consequences which stem from dubious motives and obscure driving forces. *Hamlet*, in its turn, confronts death with the clarity and high definition of the day even if the question of the day after or what comes after death still remains obscure

and enigmatic because it is impossible for anyone to know it. However, between life and death lies a whole realm of dreams, conflicts, sexuality and the unknown, all of which sometimes are difficult to fathom.

One can also infer from that passage that Yorick, the king's jester whose skull Hamlet takes in his hands, was part of his *milieu* and upbringing and died when Hamlet was seven years old. Therefore, he was probably too young to realize or register consciously the jester's absence or departure from the scene. Nevertheless, Yorick remained there somewhere in his unconscious, as a childhood memory of an adjacent person who left his mark on him and was finally reactivated by a reminder.

The point that Hamlet is reviewing and adding up his life on the scene in the cemetery at the churchyard, after he has just returned to Denmark from England, where he escaped being murdered by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern on orders of Claudius, is also mentioned by Barbara Heliodora in her book *Falando de Shakespeare*. In the same book, the author argues that,

> […] living far from the parameters of the dominant class, emotionally disengaged, the two gravediggers see the happenings with rawness and penetrating objectivity. This same meridian objectivity manifests itself in the dialogue that Hamlet holds with both and with Horatio, on his first scene after the return. Although, unfortunately, Hamlet holds for some instants the skull of Yorick and this gesture has captured the imagination of generations as a symbol of the protagonist's fixation with death, the truth is that on the scene with the gravediggers Hamlet reacquired the balance that he would have had, say, before the death of his father; and everything that he says about death is about the human condition, not about his individual death. (HELIODORA, 2009, p. 112) (Our translation).[24]

Heliodora goes on saying that that scene is used to introduce, or rather bridge, Ophelia's burial, which is taking place in the same cemetery, and in which "all the philosophical position of Hamlet vanishes before the death of Ophelia, whom he had effaced from his memory in order to accomplish his task". (HELIODORA, 2009, p. 112) (Our translation). Thus, Hamlet's philosophical speculation about death is finally counterbalanced by the simple feeling of missing someone important who is no longer alive. equilíbrio que teria tido, digamos, antes da morte do pai; e tudo o que ele diz sobre a morte é sobre a condição humana, não sobre sua morte individual.

[4] [...] vivendo longe dos parâmetros da classe dominante, emocionalmente desengajados, os dois coveiros veem os acontecimentos com crueza e objetividade penetrantes. Essa mesma e meridiana objetividade se manifesta no diálogo que Hamlet sustenta com os dois e Horácio, em sua primeira cena após a volta. Apesar de, infelizmente, Hamlet por alguns instantes segurar a caveira de Yorick e o gesto haver captado a imaginação de gerações como símbolo de fixação do protagonista com a morte, a verdade é que na cena com os coveiros Hamlet readquiriu o equilíbrio que teria tido, digamos, antes da morte do pai; e tudo o que ele diz sobre a morte é sobre a condição humana, não sobre sua morte individual.

1.1.1 The Problem of Human Inadaptability to Certain Contexts

In an analysis about the relationship involving linguistics, psychoanalysis and ethnology, Michel Foucault makes the following statement,

> At any given instant, the structure proper to individual experience finds a certain number of possible choices (and of excluded possibilities) in the systems of the society; inversely, at each of their points of choice the social structures encounter a certain number of possible individuals (and others who are not) − just as the linear structure of language always produces a possible choice between several words or several phonemes at any given moment (but excludes all others). (FOUCAULT, 1994, p. 380).

This line of thought exemplifies what goes on with Hamlet. Not only does he not seem to fit in Denmark any more than he might have in the past, he is also like a word which has lost or changed its meaning and does not belong in its original language any longer. In other words, an individual who cannot fit into the society he once belonged to. Nevertheless, he must return to his homeland, where his problems stem from, and past memories still haunt him, and where he is waited for. This famous dialogue between Hamlet, Guildenstern and Rosencrantz elucidates what Hamlet felt about Denmark before being sent to England,

> HAMLET: ... What have you, my good friends, deserved
> at the hands of Fortune that she sends you to prison hither?
> GUILDENSTERN: Prison, my lord?
> HAMLET: Denmark's a prison.
> ROSENCRANTZ: Then is the world one.
> HAMLET: A goodly one, in which there are many confines, wards,
> and dungeons, Denmark's being o' th' worst.
> ROSENCRANTZ: We think not so, my lord.
> HAMLET: Why, then 'tis none to you, for there is nothing either
> good or bad but thinking makes it so. To me it is a prison.
> ROSENCRATZ: Why then your ambition makes it one. 'Tis too
> narrow for your mind.
> HAMLET: O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count
> myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.
> (*Hamlet*, Act II, Sc. 2)

The fact that things are neither bad nor good in themselves, but only in relation to a person's judgement, is exemplified by "there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so". Likewise, the concept of evil does not exist independently nor can be completely apprehended in its intrinsic form. It only materializes through a person and can be noticed through his or her actions. As for space, it appears as a subjective form of perception that varies from person to person. Thus, it can be defined, according to the last sentence of this

dialogue, as something intimately personal and relative, but nevertheless indispensable for any kind of experience.

Another important aspect of human behaviour is that in our lives we go through different stages and play many different parts, as Jaques tells the Duke in exile in *As you like it*: "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players". (Act II, Sc. 7) This is pointed out in a more implicit and slightly twisted way in *Hamlet* in the following dialogue,

> HAMLET: ... My lord, you played once i' th' university, you say?
> POLONIUS: That did I, my lord, and was accounted a good actor.
> HAMLET: What did you enact?
> POLONIUS: I did enact Julius Cesar. I was killed i' th' Capitol;
> Brutus killed me.
> HAMLET: It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there.
> (*Hamlet*, Act III, Sc. 2)

The passage seems to reiterate what Jaques tells the Duke. The University appears in this short dialogue as a place where one can play a part, both in a symbolic role as an artist and, in a more realistic way, as a person who plays a part in the search for knowledge, intellectual contribution, means of opening one's mind and, ultimately, improving his or her life and contributing socially.

Inasmuch as Shakespeare's style differs from other previous authors and periods, it is also important to bear in mind the notable differences that lie between him and important subsequent authors such as modern Irish playwright Samuel Beckett and realist Brazilian novelist Machado de Assis, for example. In the case of the former, the reader or spectator watches somewhere between impassive, moved and mesmerized as language crumbles to its very nothingness and words become void utterances and meaningless signifiers, both of which send us back to remote areas of intuition and understanding. Shakespeare's words, on the other hand, are full of meaning and impregnated with a range of possible nuances. Language, therefore, is not put at stake as it is used as a means of conveying distinct feelings and a multitude of psychological states.

In Machado de Assis, language operates through a scathing and at times veiled irony that functions as a means of denouncing the values and morals of his time and geography, i.e., the Rio de Janeiro society of the 19th century, as well as portraying the flimsy national identity of Brazilians. Issues such as slavery and adultery and one-sided values verging on *machismo* and racism, for example, are put at stake through the use of language as a political stance that makes certain attitudes and values sound ludicrous and, at the same time, shows the gridlocks that individuals were faced with in a patriarchal repressive society. Shakespeare, in his turn,

conforms to and takes advantage of the values and ethos of Elizabethan society, criticizing them only a little and in a very indirect way. He invents characters that serve as paradigms for certain human types, and his irony is more general as it unfolds almost in absentia of the heavy weight of social and political circumstances. Therefore, most of his characters transcend the social and political boundaries of his time and geography, and are artistic constructs in themselves, rather than serving a political function. They seem to belong more to the realm of dreams and imagination and are often difficult to fit into fixed categories or be pinned down precisely.

Authors such as James Joyce (and Shakespeare too, in a more indirect way) engage with history and elevate it to an aesthetic level rather than treating historical narrative content as the only possible way of thinking history. Neither of them are historians nor do they attempt to rewrite history. Instead, they provide a new way of approaching and looking at it by transforming history and dealing with some of the main themes that affect and befall it. As Freud puts it,

> Psychoanalysis throws a satisfactory light upon some of the problems concerning arts and artists; but others escape it entirely. In the exercising of an art it sees once again an activity intended to allay ungratified wishes − in the first place in the creative artist himself and subsequently in his audience or spectators. The motive forces of artists are the same conflicts which drive other people into neurosis and have encouraged society to construct its institutions. Whence it is that the artist derives his creative capacity is not a question for psychology. The artist's first aim is to set himself free and, by communicating his work to other people suffering from the same arrested desires, he offers them the same liberation. (FREUD, 2001, p. 187).

As for the difference between writer and author, it becomes evident and clear in Shakespeare. On one side there is the writer, busy with money matters, royalties, trade in theatres, shareholdings, debt collection; and, on the other side, the author, concentrated and absorbed in creating convoluted plots and intricate characters and giving wings to imagination. Nevertheless, these two sides of the same coin always worked hand in hand to successfully fulfil Shakespeare’s dreams and ambitions. The balance between aiming at box office success, acquiring a venerable prestige and comfortable economic situation and at the same time the effort to appease his internal ghosts through writing are quite evident in Shakespeare's legacy. All these things probably worked in a symbiotic way to accomplish his desired intent and ended up turning him not only into a famous and renowned playwright, but also into the greatest writer in the English language and a literary canon in the world. As Samuel Taylor Coleridge puts it in his *Commentaries* "Shakespeare never followed a novel because he found such and such an incident in it, but because he saw that the story, as he read

it, contributed to enforce or to explain some great truth inherent in human nature". (COLERIDGE, 1963, p. 194).

1.1.2 Hamlet's Background and its Symbolism

In order to understand better *Hamlet*, let us take some sociological, historical and philosophical aspects into account, as a support to the analysis of the play and its symbolism. *Hamlet* marks a turning point in the history of England and Europe in general. The new philosophical, sociological and scientific ideas that started circulating in the United Kingdom and the Continent, from Francis Bacon to Machiavelli, through Nicolas Copernicus and Thomas Hobbes, and the new capitalist means of production and social and political organization that were taking place then, mark a rupture from the society that was once ruled by the strong religious precepts and community values of the Middle Ages. In this sense, it represents the emergence of the concept of the individual and his/her subjective needs, desires and condition.

With the end of feudalism and all that it entailed, a new type of society was being formed, that conferred more freedom to individuals from way of thinking to social mobility. No more blind submission to the king as in other times, even though monarchs still held strong power. Hence, as new hierarchies were being formed the individuals started having more means of climbing up the social ladder, their place not necessarily being determined by birth as in feudal times.

Given that Shakespeare wrote his plays and sonnets when Britain and the rest of Europe were in this period of transition, it is as if we were watching a soccer match being described or narrated while its very rules are changing. The Middle Ages were over, the Modern era was just beginning, with the Age of Discovery, and European mercantilism. As Shapiro puts it about *Hamlet* and its symbolism,

> What the Chamberlain's Men did to the wooden frame of the Theatre, Shakespeare did to the old play of Hamlet: he tore it from its familiar moorings, salvaged its structure and reassembled something new. By wrenching this increasingly outdated revenge play into the present, Shakespeare forced his contemporaries to experience what he felt and what his play registers so profoundly: the world had changed. Old certainties were gone, even if new ones had not yet taken hold. (SHAPIRO, 2010, p. 322).

With all these changes taking place, old human aspirations still remained the same. In a time when the limits and restraint previously imposed by a strict authoritarian power, represented by the Church and state, were not as efficient as they once proved to be,

individual drives became more prominent. Easier ways to give vent to human whims and villainous actions were then represented in characters such as, for example, Richard III, Iago, Claudius and Edmund.

Hegel argues that Shakespeare's characters are free artificers of themselves, which is equivalent to saying that they are able to reinvent themselves and even incorporate new personas. A statements such as "I am not what I am" is uttered by Iago (*Othello*, Act I, Sc. 1) whereas Lady Macbeth is able to play her feminine cards of fragility, receptiveness and apparent submission to others while provoking her husband into being the serpent under the innocent flower. It is possible to argue that, through the distinction between the group and the individual, plays such as *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, as well as the use of elaborate soliloquies, might have contributed or even paved the way to the more contemporary and psychological notion of subject present in the work of Sigmund Freud and later further developed and coined as a concept by Jacques Lacan.

In certain Shakespearean contexts things are not exactly what they seem and they are often borderline with uncanny feelings that real people usually have when confronted with the virtual existence of evil, as something potentially able to manifest itself in any human being. *Hamlet* focuses on the individual and his potentialities and limits. It raises the question of what it means to be and think as an individual in modern times, having to cope with the challenges and drawbacks people are usually confronted with in real life. Not surprisingly, *Hamlet* called Freud's attention, as much as *Oedipus Rex*, both of which have the theme of incest in common, the latter in an explicit manner while the former in an implicit one. In a passage from *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud argues that,

> 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 in the case of a neurosis − we only learn of its existence from its inhibiting consequences. Strangely enough, the overwhelming effect produced by the more modern tragedy has turned out to be compatible with the fact that people have remained completely in the dark as to the hero's character. The play is built up on Hamlet's hesitations over fulfilling the task of revenge that is assigned to him; but its text offers no reasons or motives for these hesitations and an immense variety of attempts at interpreting them have failed to produce a result. (FREUD, 1980, p. 298).

As Marjorie Garber puts it "Freud mentions Goethe's belief that Hamlet's ‘power of direct action is paralysed by an excessive development of his intellect’ (in effect Goethe as Hamlet), and notes that in fact Hamlet is able to act efficiently with respect to many other

rivals and dangers, just not in the killing of the king." (GARBER, 2008, p. 207) She points out that the reason for this, according to Freud, is that Hamlet sees mirrored in Claudius' actions the wishes in relation to his parents that he repressed as a child. Thus, the wish that he had to get rid of his father and take his place with his mother is materialized by his uncle. This is enough to shock and paralyze him, just in the same way that almost any person would feel when confronted by someone else who did freely and without feeling guilt what the first person would only accept as an unconscious wish. In this sense, Claudius works like a mirror in which Hamlet sees amplified and projected all that he considers to be his own negative or bad aspects and that should, therefore, and according to his logic, remain concealed and repressed. Basing her ideas on different quotes by Freud, T.S. Eliot and James Joyce, Marjorie Garber, in her article "Hamlet: The Matter of Character", sees the ghost in *Hamlet* as an *alter ego* to Shakespeare, who lost his young son Hamnet and was haunted by the tragedy. Garber argues that the creation of the figure of a ghost might provoke a sense of identification and function as a way to relieve the author's pain. Moreover, in the beginning of the play the ghost can only be perceived in a negative way, i.e., through other characters, thus resembling a symptom or a kind of *malaise*.

1.1.3 How Evil is Dealt with and Solved in Hamlet

Although *Hamlet*'s plot is considerably complex and thoroughly developed, the way evil is dealt with and solved in the play is rather simple and straightforward. As in most Shakespearean tragedies, the number of casualties involving the main characters is considerably high: Hamlet, Gertrude, Claudius, Polonius, Laertes and Ophelia die, be it through poisoning, manslaughter, fighting or suicide.

Unlike *Macbeth*, however, where evil can at best be encircled, in *Hamlet* evil ends with itself: it is its own destructive agent. The witches, who planted the seeds of evil, remain alive in the first play, still practicing their magical and circular ritual somewhere, whereas in *Hamlet*, Claudius, the man who committed the unnatural crime of assassinating the King, who manipulated others behind the scene and tried to kill Hamlet through Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, dies in the fighting scene between Hamlet and Laertes. This happens in the last scene of the last act of the play, and he dies through his own poison, i.e., by being stabbed by Hamlet with the sword he empoisoned to kill his nephew and by being forced by Hamlet to drink from the poisoned cup after Gertrude had drunk it and passed away. According to the ancient ways, the natural state of order is restored, the ghost is finally allowed to rest, and

peace is restored into the country. According to the modern ways everyone is dead, no one remained to reign, and the kingdom has to be surrendered to Fortinbras.

In this play, death appears as a remedy for human afflictions and desperation, including our fear of death and of not being able to succeed in our endeavours. Contrary to *Macbeth*, where evil is a more diffuse thing that infiltrates human relationships and acts as a mould, i.e., as a deteriorating element that has no single core and proves to be irreversible, in *Hamlet* evil is easier for the reader and audience to pinpoint it because it has only one source that spreads to others: Claudius. Once identified, it can then be encircled and finally eliminated, even if this leads Marcellus, who plays the role of an officer, to exclaim to Hamlet's friend, Horatio, after both try to approach the Ghost of Hamlet's father, that "something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (*Hamlet*, Act I, Sc. 4).

Although Hamlet expects evil to manifest itself transparently and in its totality and true form, it is so layered and intercepted by manifestations of good will (whether real or not) that it becomes difficult for him to distinguish where it comes from and pin it down, thus making his actions more vulnerable and susceptible of error. A parallel with our lives could easily be traced here. However, once evil in *Hamlet* is finally spotted, it can then be addressed, tackled, solved and finally completely eliminated, even though this whole process is complicated and traumatic. Nevertheless, Hamlet's conflicts and internal dramas, as well as evil itself, can only be successfully resolved in the play through a sort of collective death.

Marjorie Garber, writing about the psychoanalytic reading and reception of literature in this and the last century, states:

> In the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, there have been at least three kinds of psychoanalytic readings associated with literature: a psychoanalysis of the author (Shakespeare's symptoms), a psychoanalysis of the character (Hamlet's symptoms), and a psychoanalysis of the text (the symptoms exhibited by Hamlet the play, like the splitting of characters into good father and bad father, or the linguistic symptoms like repetition, metaphor, or other figures of speech). In this last kind of reading the play is like a dream, an imaginative work made of signs and symbols, available for interpretation. It is really only this last kind of work that escapes from "character criticism" in the old speculative style, and moves toward an understanding of the text multiplicities, the way it can be read and performed at different times in different ways, each persuasive. The business of the literary critic is not diagnosis but interpretation. (GARBER, 2008, p. 209).

In psychoanalytical terms, we could say that evil in *Hamlet* appears as a concept in a framework. It corresponds to something that can pervade or intercept our lives and must, therefore, be dealt with in an adult way. Moreover, it is through the use of soliloquies that one can deal mentally and emotionally with it. Hamlet, the character, appears hesitant in the

beginning because he knows that evil, in his case, is not something that can be easily traced and pinned down from the outset, nor can it be addressed and solved without a great effort. Instead, it must be questioned, probed, identified, analysed and then finally addressed and tackled. It would be unfair to condemn Hamlet for the time he takes to achieve his revenge. He is merely all too aware of and analytical about the possible implications of any taking of action in the predicament in which he finds himself. In other words, he had a very difficult task ahead of him.

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