

## Assumption of the Truth in *Hamlet*

Samya Seth

In the “Preface to *Seminar XI*” Lacan counterbalances two definitions: “the unconscious [...] is real,” and “psych = (fiction of).”<sup>1</sup> Lacan couldn’t be clearer: the psyche of an analysand is the fiction with which they subjectivize, live with, their real. As Patricia Bosquin-Caroz reminds us, the structure of fiction is precisely what allows a narrative to approach the unsayable, there where revelation stops – where truth falls short of the real, nearest it.<sup>2</sup> Lacan’s remark that psychoanalysis is “a narrative that would itself be the locus of the encounter at stake in the narrative”<sup>3</sup> addresses this gap. Since the Other of the Other from whom one could expect a guarantee for the relation between one’s truth and one’s real doesn’t exist, it befalls a speaking being to be preoccupied by the *varité of the sinthome* while what is said awaits its verification, even its quilting, from an encounter to come.<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* demonstrates the impasses of this post-truth position.

The father’s ghost brutally lays bare the non-rapport as such (the king-father has been murdered and the queen-mother is in bed with the murderer-usurper-uncle), and enjoins the son to a rendezvous with that very non-rapport (he must avenge his father by murdering his uncle-stepfather, but without harming his mother).

Hamlet’s actions show us the limits of any attempt to subjectivize such a revelation without recourse to a psychoanalysis. For him the symbolic is bankrupt: goodwill, faith and hope have all been revoked and the margin between truth and the real has collapsed.<sup>5</sup> Only the imaginary remains to treat this real.

The step of fiction through which Hamlet translates himself into the text of his history is the *mousetrap*, where the one shown pouring poison into the sleeping king’s ear is the king’s nephew, not the brother. Hamlet, thus, introduces his own image into the play-scene not in a position of accomplishing the revenge but of assuming the very crime to be avenged.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lacan, J., “Preface to the English Language Edition,” *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. A. Sheridan, New York/London: Norton, 1978, p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> Bosquin-Caroz, P., “Varity. Variations of Truth in Psychoanalysis. Presentation of the NLS Congress Theme 2026,” p. 6. Available at: <https://www.amp-nls.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/ARGUMENT-NLS-CONGRESS-2026-PBC.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VI, Desire and its Interpretation*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. B. Fink, Cambridge: Polity, 2019, p. 485.

<sup>4</sup> Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XXIV, L’insu que sait de l’une-bévue s’aile à mourre*, lesson of 19th April 1977, *Ornicar?* 17/18, Spring 1979, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Lacan, J., *Book VI*, op. cit., pp. 298, 402.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 405; and Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X, Anxiety*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. A.R. Price, Cambridge: Polity, 2016, p. 35.

Through his next fictive act Hamlet manages to remobilize the aborted circuit of mourning in the world of the play. In the closet scene, he strikes out at what's hidden behind the veil – saying, utterly implausibly, that it's Claudius. That it is Polonius who's killed thus, opens up the hole in reality into which Ophelia gets sucked. Her suicide subsequently constitutes the very place where the missing ideal may be projected, allowing the symbolic order to be redeemed through the work of mourning for the lost object.<sup>7</sup>

It is, Lacan says, only as a subject of mourning that Hamlet can begin to separate from the alienation of his assigned history. Only then can he identify, beyond criminal or victim, with “himself as the possible author of the cut.”<sup>8</sup>

Such mourning notwithstanding, what chance would a Hamlet have, without the benefit of an analysis, of separating the reality of his father's murder from the real of absolute surprise with which that father lets himself be overcome by his fate? It's hard to imagine.

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<sup>7</sup> Lacan, J., *Book VI*, op. cit., p. 336.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 351, 431; and Lacan, J., *Book X*, op. cit., pp. 36-7.