

Catching Truth with the Bait of Falsehood

Emmanouil Kaffetzakis

“Your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth”.¹ This striking phrase by Polonius defines the central mechanism of Act 2, Scene 1 of *Hamlet*.² In this scene, Polonius, the counsellor of Denmark, sends his servant Reynaldo to inquire about the behaviour of his son Laertes, who is in France for his studies. Polonius advises Reynaldo to use cunning in order to obtain the necessary information. He instructs him to fabricate false rumours about Laertes’ behaviour and spread them among Danish people living in Paris who know his son. When confronted with these false statements, the interlocutors, if they have witnessed any misconduct, will reveal their own testimony of such actions.

During analysis, there are certain moments when the analyst, echoing Polonius in *Hamlet*, catches a truth with the bait of falsehood. Freud examined this himself: “[...] no damage is done if, for once in a way, we make a mistake and offer the patient a wrong construction as the probable historical truth.”³ If a construction is wrong, the patient simply does not take it up, it has no effect on him. But Freud also observed that an inexact interpretation can resonate with the subject, and then new material emerges.

This is not a licence for analytic carelessness. Miller will interpret Freud’s suggestion as confidence in the unconscious.⁴ The unconscious will do its work whether a presented construction is true or not. Even an incorrect construction may work upon the patient and produce authentic material for further processing. This raises a question that sits at the heart of our congress theme: perhaps truth has its own insistence, and the analyst’s construction merely creates the conditions for its emergence.

In psychoanalysis, as Patricia Bosquin-Caroz states in her argument⁵, we are not concerned with the exactitude of an objective reality. We are concerned with the revelation of a truth that involves the subject of the unconscious. Such revelations of truth come forward through formations of the

¹ Shakespeare, W., *Hamlet*. London: Macmillan, 2008.

² *Ibid.*

³ Freud, S., “Constructions in Analysis” (1937), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXIII*. London: Hogarth Press, 1966.

⁴ Miller, J.-A., “Marginalia to ‘Constructions in Analysis’”, *Psychoanalytical Notebooks 22*, 2011.

⁵ Bosquin-Caroz, P., Variations of Truth in Psychoanalysis. Presentation of the NLS Congress Theme 2026, p.7. Available at: <https://www.amp-nls.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/ARGUMENT-NLS-CONGRESS-2026-PBC.pdf>

unconscious. This truth cannot be fully grasped. It can only be encountered, recognized in its vanishing. Truth speaks whether we grasp it or not. The unconscious always operates.