"More than kin and less than kind": Hamlet and His (Linguistic) Problems

Alireza Mahdipour[1], Pyeaam Abbasi[2]
[1,2] University of Isfahan, IRAN
e-mails: [1]alireza.mahdipour@gmail.com; [2]Pyeaam77@yahoo.co.uk

ABSTRACT

T.S. Eliot's "Hamlet and His Problems" (1921) seems to be a pretext to add another erudite concept to the lexis of literary criticism. He charged both Hamlet and *Hamlet* of lacking "objective correlative." Eliot's own problem with the play, however, seems to arise from his particular epistemological perspective, his formalism, and even his implicit structuralism, and moreover, from his traditional, classic Cartesian modernity that suffers him to hold the notion of subject-object dichotomy in his literary speculations. Hamlet's problem, however, surpasses T. S. Eliot's structuralist view and anticipates the poststructuralist linguistic enigma. *Hamlet* and Hamlet's problems are, together with the other characters that are caught in the maze of language, linguistic. Hamlet's epistemological/ontological quest for the meaning or the truth are checked, patterned, done and ultimately undone by the language. He cannot find any "objective correlative" for his "particular emotion," for, in the signifying system of the language, all he can think or feel is restrained by "words". He cannot escape from the symbolic order of the language until his death, and "the rest is silence".

Keywords: Hamlet; *Hamlet*; T.S. Eliot; objective correlative; structuralism; post-structuralism.

> **"My language! heavens!**
> **I am the best of them that speak this speech,**
> **Were I but where 'tis spoken."**
>
> **Ferdinand,** ***The Tempest*** (I. ii. 429-431)

INTRODUCTION

Ferdinand's boast of his linguistic competence is depreciated by Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of language that focuses on the objective signifying system of *the langue*, subordinating diachronic to synchronic approach to language at the expense of undermining the creation of meaning by the subjective, socio-historical human agent. Henceforth is the castration of "the Word," which was once "with God, and …was God."[*] Words were reduced to be mere signs in conventional sign systems that promote syntax over semantics. And hence was the reduction of human agent to prattling parrots, and then the death of the author, a verdict reached by fervent structuralism.

Philosophically speaking, Saussure's linguistic theory is the retreat of language from the field of hermeneutic ontology back into the marketplace of epistemology. Language is to be the conveyor of meaning rather than the cultivator and creator of it. The marketplace dominates the field and thus language is reduced as a commodity of culture rather than the harvest of nature. As Robert Holub observes, "[a]s a pretender to scientific objectivity, structuralism aims at distancing, at objectifying, at eliminating subjectivity from its method. Hermeneutics, by contrast, emphasizes the situatedness of the observer and the necessity for taking into account unavoidable preconceptions" (Selden, 285).

However, in the context of fast changing and developing European vernacular languages, especially in the cultural age of the Renaissance, and later, by the advent of Modernity, Saussure's structuralist theory of language was a historio-geographical necessity. Indeed, since the Medieval period or early Renaissance the Western languages, especially English, changed so rapidly that the poetry of Chaucer, for example, was not appreciated thoroughly by the Elizabethan audience in its original form, and

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[*] *The Gospel According to Saint John*, the opening verse.

so was Shakespeare for the posterity.[†] Thus, Saussure's synchronic approach eased language from the accumulative burden of philological and historical connotations that had rendered the words confusing and misleading.

The legacy of structuralism surpassed the boundaries of linguistics and spread to other fields of humanities, including imaginative literature, which tended to be naturally acclaimed and adopted by linguistics. However, Russian Formalists, the forerunners of structuralism in literature, diagnosed the shortcomings of the Saussurean approach to literature, which neglected the historicity of literary texts, and they attempted to reconcile the two fields by offering the theory of literary language and attempted to device literary grammars and narrative poetics. These endeavors culminated in the strict formalism of the New Critics who shared and promoted ideas including literature as an organic tradition.

"From Dr Johnson to Eliot, for many critics the character of Hamlet was a mistake on Shakespeare's part because he fails to provide a clear-cut reason for Hamlet's indecision." However, T. S. Eliot's "arguably humanist literary exegetics in expressing difficulty with both *Hamlet* as a drama and Hamlet as the character" is refuted by Ehsan Azari in his Lacanian analysis of the play (Azari, 78).

T. S. Eliot's brief, provocative essay "Hamlet and His Problems" (1921) attributes the problem of both *Hamlet* the play and Hamlet the character to the lack of "objective correlative," yet he does not offer an appropriate "objective correlative" for Hamlet's "particular emotion." If the emotion were too complex and baffling for Hamlet or Shakespeare or Eliot to grasp, is it considered an artistic failure? Is Eliot's Hamlet identical with that of Shakespeare's, and should we have just one Hamlet, and is the text of the play a sufficient bearer of the word 'Hamlet'?

This paper attempts to show that T. S. Eliot's essay, which is an outcome of the aforementioned structuralist formalist approach to literature, shows the typical limitations and shortcomings of the formalistic approach and New Criticism in dealing with many profound human problems such as what are depicted in Shakespeare's plays.

[†] In contrast with these fast changing European languages, some Middle Eastern languages such as Arabic or perhaps Hebrew have relatively kept their historical integrity and stability. It should also be noted that in spite of Saussure's linguistic theory, these Semitic languages have nursed a natural relation between many signifiers and signified, between the word and the world, especially in the names of men and women. Nearly all the names of characters in the *Old Testament* are meaningful, and not arbitrary. The words are mystically, religiously, or practically impregnated with meaning.

T. S. ELIOT AND HIS PROBLEMS

Like other formalists and structuralists, T. S. Eliot, was aware of the inadequacy of linguistic rules and terms to be applied to literature. Eliot's invention of the "Objective Correlative" was part of his project to cope with this problem. However, his celebrated formulation which was to solve some stylistic problems of the New Criticism or some other Modernist project of poetry, added some other problems, namely, the problems of Hamlet the character or *Hamlet* the play, or both.

Eliot himself, however, was later "embarrassed" by the "callowness" of his essay and called his work "impudence." He went so far as to deny that the term "objective correlative" was his own invention (Greenburg, 215). Thus the enormity of his blasphemy toward Shakespeare was admitted and atoned, but the invented or borrowed term "objective correlative" remained celebrated and cherished by the critics, like his other terms such as "impersonality", "dissociation of sensibility", etc., until in the later poststructuralist context they seemed out of place. In referring to Eliot's own poetry and prose,

> Critics of "Hamlet and His Problems" tend to treat it as a patient etherized upon a table, from which they feel able to surgically remove the idea of the "objective correlative," dissociating it from its context. The essay itself is rarely discussed as having any bearing on Hamlet whatsoever, and has become little more than a vehicle for bringing into the critical vocabulary a conceptual formulation that has proved difficult and often unwieldy for criticism (ibid, 217).

But what is "objective correlative" and what is the problem with it, if there should be any such legitimate term at all? In his formulation of how to express emotion in art (or literature) Eliot states that

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked" (Eliot, 49).

His definition of the term is reliant on Derridean so-called "transcendental signified" that is pathetically trapped in binary relations. The words "emotion", "objective", and "external facts" are terms that imply their equally elusive binaries of reason, subjective, and internal facts, respectively. What is this "emotion" in Eliot's mind, and what is Hamlet's "*particular* emotion"? Is there an objective or hermeneutic way of

finding it out? And can it be ontologically tangible and stable throughout the play?

Eliot's typically modernist view can be further elaborated in his criticism of Goethe and Coleridge in the opening paragraph of the essay where he accuses these two accomplished poets and critics of appropriation or adaptation or manipulation of Hamlet. He argues that "[t]hese minds often find in Hamlet a vicarious existence for their own artistic realization." Goethe "made of Hamlet a Werther; and … Coleridge… made of Hamlet a Coleridge." Thus, in "their critical aberrations" they substituted "their own Hamlet for Shakespeare's" (Eliot, 47).

The question is, however, who or what is Shakespeare's Hamlet at all? Is he an "objective", "external fact" whose "emotion" can be reached at and defined and his enigma resolved by the epistemological methodologies of T. S. Eliot, the classic-modernist who believes in the referentiality of language that represents the perceivable world? According to Harold Bloom,

> There is no "real" Hamlet as there is no "real" Shakespeare: the character, like the writer, is a reflecting pool, a spacious mirror in which we needs must see ourselves. Permit this dramatist a concourse of contraries, and he will show us everybody and nobody, all at once. We have no choice but to permit Shakespeare, and his Hamlet, everything, because neither has a rival (Bloom, 401).

In his criticism of traditional approaches to Hamlet's problem, Ian Kott also observes that "[t]raditional nineteenth-century Hamletology devoted itself almost exclusively to the study of the problem who Hamlet really was. Those traditional scholars charged Shakespeare with having written an untidy, inconsistent and badly constructed masterpiece" (Kott 57). His own impression of the play is amazingly new, anticipating postmodern views, despite the fact that he was a contemporary of Eliot himself, and his book *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1964) appeared almost simultaneously with Eliot's essay. Ian Kott believes that

> *Hamlet* is like a sponge. Unless it is produced in a stylized or antiquarian fashion, it immediately absorbs all the problems of our time. It is the strangest play ever written, by its very imperfections. *Hamlet* is a great scenario, in which every character has a more or less tragic and cruel part to play, and has magnificent things to say. Every character has an irrevocable task to fulfil, a task imposed by the author. This scenario is independent of the characters; it has

been devised earlier. It defines the situations, as well as the mutual relations of the characters; it dictates their words and gestures. But it does not say who the characters are. It is something external in relation to them. And that is why the scenario of *Hamlet* can be played by different sorts of characters (ibid, 63).

Here Ian Kott transcends the traditional views of concentration on the hero or the so-called major characters and pays attention to the marginalized characters who also share some anguishes and aporias akin to those of the hero's. The opening scene of the play, with the introduction of some marginal minor characters, is a case in point:

The play opens by a question, and a controversial one:

ACT ONE

SCENE I. *Elsinore. The guard-platform before the castle*
FRANCISCO *at his post. Enter to him* BERNARDO

Bernardino
Who's there?
Francisco
Nay, answer me. Stand, and unfold yourself.
Bernardino
Long live the King!
Francisco
Bernardo?
Bernardino
He.   5
Francisco
You come most carefully upon your hour.
Bernardino
'Tis now struck twelve; get thee to bed, Francisco.
Francisco
For this relief much thanks. 'Tis bitter cold, And I am sick at heart.
Bernardino
Have you had quiet guard?
Francisco
Not a mouse stirring. 10
Bernardino
Well, good night.
If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus,
The rivals of my watch, bid them make haste.
Enter HORATIO and MARCELLUS
Francisco
I think I hear them. Stand, ho! Who is there?
Horatio
Friends to this ground.
Marcellus And liegemen to the Dane.   15
Francisco
 Give you good night.
Marcellus O, farewell, honest soldier!

Who hath relieved you?
Francisco
    Bernardo hath my place.
    Give you good night.
    Exit
    Marcellus Holla! Bernardo!
Bernardino
    Say,
    What, is Horatio there?
Horatio
    A piece of him.
Bernardino
    Welcome, Horatio; welcome, good Marcellus.
    20
Horatio
    What, has this thing appear'd again to-night?
Bernardino
    I have seen nothing.

Shakespeare could hardly be casual or negligent of the dialogues in the opening scenes of his plays. The dialogues are relevantly "out of joint" as the "time" is. In the dark cold still hours of midnight a solitary soldier is standing on guard, apparently seeing nothing in that epistemological void, when ironically, another guard who is to relieve him, and who seem to already know him, asks him the absurd unnecessary, yet ontological question, "Who's there?" This initiating question which will be reiterated throughout the play, perhaps refers to Bernardo's past encounter with the supernatural or illusive apparition who is going to appear again. The traumatic aporia, the crisis, the distrust, the anguish, the uneasiness, the uncertainty and doubt are thus common and comprehensive in the play; experienced by the lowest rank soldiers of the state, and not limited to the prince Hamlet who is still unaware of the apparition. The keywords of "man", "think", "to be", and the word "word" itself are the most illusory in the play. These are the words that are clustered in Descartes well-known phrase, "*Cogito ergo sum*;" three philosophical (existential), psychological, and linguistic controversies in a three-words phrase: Who am "I"? What is "thinking", and what is "being"? And all these speculations are communicated via "words, words, words" (II, ii, 192), which have been Hamlet's preoccupation, or rather, obsession.

The guards come to know one another in an unusual way of greeting and respond. Francisco's required question of "Who's there?" is uttered by his required addressee Bernardo who is expected to "unfold" himself. Bernardo's "Long live the King!" as an answer, or as a watchword, links the characters to the highest rank character and the state. Francisco still doubts who is his addresser and questions him back by the affirmative "Bernardo?" for which Bernardo gives another unusual affirming answer, the pronoun "He."

Francisco appreciates Bernardo's punctuality and thanks him for the relief, which can be an introduction of the theme of "delay" in the play. Bernardo talks about Horatio and Marcellus as the rivals of his watch, who have not appeared yet, and asks Francisco to "bid them make haste" if he meet them, as apparently he is afraid of being alone. Francisco thinks he hears them, yet he doubtfully asks "Who is there?" Horatio and Marcellus appear and give different answers to him (perhaps they do not know the watchword as they were not required to be on guards that night.) However, Marcellus asks an apparently unnecessary question from Francisco, "Who hath reliev'd you?" although he is required to know that he was Bernardo. When he greets Bernardo by name, instead of asking "Who's there?" like Bernardo asked Francisco at the beginning, we come to know the necessity of his question. He is now certain that it is Bernardo, by Francisco's testimony.

Another problem is raised by Bernardo's exclamatory question from Marcellus: "What, is Horatio there?" though he has already told Francisco of Horatio and Marcellus's coming as rivals of his watch. Horatio's unusual affirmation of his presence "A piece of him" adds to the mystery, yet we may surmise that both Bernardo and Horatio himself were doubtful of Horatio's coming at all.

Doubt and uncertainty are the main concerns of the play and the characters, with their major quest to be to know one another. The signifiers used by the guards such as "long live the King", "He", "A piece of him" as the introduction of themselves are illusive and playful. They foreshadow Hamlet's quest for "What a piece of work is a man!" In his quest to know Claudius, who has baffled him by being "more than kin and less than kind" to him, hamlet uses signifiers or tropes such as "The mouse-trap." Yet a man is not known, in an Existential sense, until he is dead, since man's existence precedes his essence, and his so-called self being just a bubble, he is no more than the totality of his deeds. It is thus meaningful and perhaps symbolic that Polonius' identity is revealed only after his death by Hamlet, when his report card of his deeds, like anybody else, is completed, his self is determined and defined, and people's final judgments of him are decided.

"The characters of the play try to discover the real hamlet; to unmask him, but the fact is that there is no real, determined Hamlet. There is no real face behind the seemingly various masks they believe he wears" (Mahdipour, 141). King Claudius has organized a staff of Hamletology to catch Hamlet's state of mind. However, Hamlet is, like Horatio, only "a piece of

him[self]". He and other characters are, in the Existential sense, undecided and incomplete, like their actions and lives. What is a man, after all, but the totality of his actions? Many characters in the play are depicted by signifiers that are synecdoches: Father Hamlet is a ghost, Horatio is "a piece of him[self]", Yorick is a skull, and Guildenstern and Rosencrantz are half men who complete one another, and Polonius can be anybody. He is killed as Hamlet takes him for his "better", the King.

ELIOT'S CARTESIAN COGNITIVE APPROACH

In his epistemological quest for formulating "emotion" which he tries to correlate to the objective facts and events, Eliot's methodology is modernist and Cartesian. He overlooks the fact of the subject's facticity, or "thrownness", in Heideggerean sense. He advocates the subject-object dichotomy, and accordingly both the critic and Hamlet of the play are required to be transcendental Cartesian subjects brooding over the object or the objective truth of the play; the "external facts" or as is fashionable today, the Other.

In his formalistic, classic, New Critical approach, Eliot tends to seek unity and coherence of the themes and character of the work and thus he reduces Hamlet to an objective figure with "particular" emotion to be discovered. The character should be, according to formalist ideology, plausible, consistent, motivated, and properly dramatized. Problems of Hamlet's "delay", his "madness", and his "motive" are to be solved and the "unexplained scenes", "superfluous and inconsistent scenes", the "intractability" and the "puzzling and disquieting" modes of the play are instances of Shakespeare's "artistic failure" in *Hamlet*, though people find it "interesting." Eliot concludes that "[t]he grounds of *Hamlet's* failure are not immediately obvious. Mr. Robertson is undoubtedly correct in concluding that the essential emotion of the play is the feeling of a son towards a guilty mother." (Eliot, 48).

In such a reductionist approach Eliot is strictly formalist; overlooking the philosophical, psychological, socio-political subtleties of such a complex play and character. Likewise, he reduces Othello's emotion to "suspicion", Antony's to "infatuation", Coriolanus' to "pride", in the plays that are "intelligible, self-complete" tragedies. *Hamlet*, however, "is full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate, or manipulate into art" (Eliot, 49). This idea of shortcoming in the play and character, however, is not shared by most of the critics. Harold

Bloom, for instance, attributes "self-conscious" theatricality to Hamlet and calls him "the intellectual ironist" whose "consciousness" allows him to have "a mind so powerful that the most contrary attitudes, values, and judgments can coexist within it coherently, so coherently indeed that Hamlet nearly has become all things to all men, and to some women" (Bloom, 402).

Eliot, on the contrary, finds "this feeling…. very difficult to localize" (Eliot, 49). Hence is the otherwise unnecessary formulation of his "objective correlative" to justify this assumed failure on the part of both Shakespeare and Hamlet. The formula, however, seems a failure in itself, as Eliot provides little justification for its application. To illustrate the formula, he characteristically uses structuralist method of binary oppositions. After comparison and contrast of the play with its preceding revenge tragedies such as Thomas Kyd's play, to shed some light on the meaning and value of the play, he now compares Lady Macbeth and Macbeth with Hamlet; allowing the former characters to enjoy their respective objective correlative which "is deficient in *Hamlet*." Yet his examples (told by an Elite!), are vague, "signifying nothing," except the use of language (which Hamlet also uses, nevertheless, and more prolific), instead of "a set of objects, or a chain of events," etc. as "objective equivalence" for their particular emotions.

In sum, Eliot's thesis of objective correlative seems to fill the gap of his Cartesian modern dyad view of the so-called reality: subject vs. object, internal vs. external, consciousness vs. the world.

HAMLET AND HIS LINGUISTIC PROBLEMS

In her attempt to explore Shakespeare's language Inga-Stina Ewbank observes that in the "particularly fruitful climate" that Shakespeare lived his "imagination could exercise itself in a climate of preoccupation with language." It was the age of English Renaissance, when "[l]anguage questions affected not only literature but practically every other sphere of cultural and social life as well: religion, philosophy, politics, law, etc" (Wells, 50). She is optimistic on the power and function of language and Shakespeare's use of it:

> It is out of such fruitful ambivalences that Shakespeare's use of language springs: his apparently paradoxical combination of belief and doubt. If conceptually there is a gap between word and thing, rhetorically it is amazing what things a man or a woman can achieve. From beginning to end_ from *Titus Andronicus*

and the *Henry VI* plays to *The Tempest_* Shakespeare's plays testify to nothing so much as to his interest in what people can do to themselves and to each other by language…. And if language often constructs fictions rather than embodying truths, then again it is amazing what power… those fictions can exercise. In this sense, Shakespeare's interest in the arts of language is as practical, as much directed towards *function*, as that of the rhetoricians. His ultimate interest, after all, is to persuade us, the audience, of the human realities of thought and feeling in his plays (ibid, 50-51).

She refers to the educated Elizabethans' "utterly self-conscious" use of language and concludes that

It is natural for Shakespeare's characters to be aware of registers and regional and class dialects, indeed virtually to identify language with a way of life…. It is natural that they should note the absurdity of language reduced to formulas…., or find language inadequate to extremes of emotion_ love, grief, suffering_ as does almost every character in *King Lear*. And it is natural that they should be conscious of the gap that can exist between language and truth …. When characters laugh at excesses or deplore the possibility that 'words, words, words' may be merely false, Shakespeare's linguistic self-consciousness should not be confused with modernistic doubts about the veracity of language. Nor should Shakespeare as a language practitioner be confused with his own characters. Some of his most highly charged language is about the emptiness of words (ibid).

The above quotation refutes, though indirectly, T. S. Eliot's implied notion of the inadequacy of language of art in expressing particular emotions, for which he offered the 'objective correlative' device as a remedy. They also assert the naturalness of the consciousness "of the gap that can exist between language and truth." This consciousness, which is perhaps the most intense in Hamlet than the other Shakespeare's characters, is significantly expressed by Hamlet, in his first utterance in the play (significantly again), and that in the form of an aside: "A little more than kin, and less than kind" (I, ii, 65). This sentence, mostly self-reflective than an address, is the emblem of his enigma. He is caught in the kinship relation that the language of Lacanian symbolic order has imposed on him; "in the *name of the father* that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law" (Rivkin & Ryan, 186).

ACT ONE
Scene II
King

.....

   But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son,--
Hamlet [*Aside*]

   A little more than kin, and less than kind.   65
King

   How is it that the clouds still hang on you?
Hamlet

   Not so, my lord; I am too much in the sun.

The words "kin" and "kind" are semantically, phonetically, and perhaps even etymologically akin to one another, and so is the word "king" at the feudal family relationship.[‡]

Hamlet summarizes his enigmatic relation to the king in the very opening sentence of his, which can be the meaning of the whole play, like the three witches' "Fair is foul and foul is fair" in *Macbeth* that be the catchword of the play. Hamlet puts forward a mathematical problem, an unsolvable non-equation: Claudius is more than kin and less than kind to Hamlet:

$$\text{kin} < x < \text{kind}$$

There is virtually no word (semantically, phonetically, and grapheme-atically) to fill the place of x that stands as a signifier for King Claudius. If Claudius were just a kin, as he had been before, there would be no problem, and if he were also kind, it would be all right, but by killing Hamlet's father and marrying his mother and usurping the throne he is now more than a kin, and less than kind. The x of the non-equation is a missing signifier that has been usurped by the false impossible signifier, Claudius, and thus, an impossibility.

Hamlet's problem is not his father's death, as he knows as her mother says that it is common that all that lives must die. His problem is that by Claudius' calling him his "son" and her mother's hasty marriage and the replacement of as the king, Claudius has

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[‡] And so is the Hebrew "Cain" of the Old Testament (who is considered as the father of mankind, after Adam) or the Arabic "قوم" or the Turkish "Gain" or "Qain" which is applied in the contemporary Turkish to the brother of one's spouse.

More can be said about the etymology of these words: "Kin" in Old English cynn, of Germanic origin; related to Dutch kunne, from an Indo-European root meaning "give birth to", shared by Greek genos and Latin genus 'race'. The Old English cynn meaning "family; race; kind, sort, rank; nature."

"Kind": Old English cynd(e), gecynd(e), of Germanic origin; related to kin. The original sense was 'nature, the natural order', also "innate character, from, or condition' hence 'a class or race distinguished by innate characteristics.'

annihilated his father, not merely killing him (for which deed Hamlet is still Claudius unaware). Claudius has disrupted the signifying system of family relation by annihilating King Hamlet, and the prince Hamlet is afflicted by the existential anguishes of being and death. Perhaps that is the reason why the ghost of King Hamlet appears to claim his existence in the realm of language sign system, for which the guards in the beginning of the play apply the temporary signifier "thing."

Hamlet's epistemological-ontological quest for truth is expressed in terms of metaphors, as the literal language fails him. Yet the metaphors are themselves bound in the same semantic field of the language signifying system, and are pathetically signifiers of other things. Thus, a chain of endless significations occur, with no avail, and the fulfillment is always deferred. Signifiers remain subjective and metaphoric, and this is the predicament of Hamlet or anyone who uses language.

Throughout the play, Hamlet tends to catch the words of others and changes the signified or expands them and renders them differently to indicate the inadequacy or absurdity of language as the conveyor of truth. His play with the words "son" and "cloud" that King Claudius uses is a case in point. He uses the apt word "cloud" in his play with Polonius, more elaborately:

ACT THREE,
Scene II

Polonius
    My lord, the queen would speak with you, and presently.
Hamlet
    Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?
Polonius
    By th' mass, and 'tis like a camel, indeed.
Hamlet
    Methinks it is like a weasel.
Polonius
    It is back'd like a weasel.
Hamlet
    Or like a whale?
Polonius
    Very like a whale.
Hamlet
    Then I will come to my mother by and by.
    [*Aside*] They fool me to the top of my bent. I will come by and by.
Polonius
    I will say so.

Hamlet's reply to Polonius's statement is typically "disjoint". Instead of replying to him normally he distracts his addressee by referring to the extended metaphor of his; the "cloud" which he has caught from Claudius's conversation. The unstable, ever-changing "cloud" is used as a metaphor that can signify many things and Hamlet shows the absurdity of Polonius' communications.

Hamlet's last words in the play are also symbolically impregnated: "The rest is silence" as he has escaped from the symbolic order of the language to the realm of Lacanian real order.

In his attempt "to show the significance of Lacan's sustained criticism of *Hamlet* for contemporary poststructuralist Shakespeare Studies" Ehsan Azari first clarifies "Eliot's trouble with *Hamlet*" (Azari, 78) and concludes that "[c]ontrary to Eliot's assertion, Shakespeare has successfully illustrated the ambiguous state in which Hamlet continuously procrastinates and remains indecisive through unpredictable changes of behavior." (ibid, 79). Azari attributes Hamlet's "series of bizarre actions" in the play to the "symptomatic aspect of Hamlet's desire" relating to;

> The gaps in the real that emerge uncensored in Shakespeare's play. The gap in the real and consequently in the existence of the subject, as Lacan emphasizes, cannot be articulated in the signifying chain because of *the limit of language* in homogenizing the real. These gaps locate Hamlet and his desire in what Lacan calls 'the blackout of signifiers' (49). This blackout or syncope means that when an act or gesture doesn't lend itself to signification, it emerges in the real. This is a situation of a total loss where the function of speech_ the symbolic exchange and the function of love_ transference_ all fail. (ibid, 80) [Italics mine]

Of all the much-debated peculiarities of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, his use of language is peculiarly unique. W. H. Clemen calls the play "a turning-point in the development of Shakespeare's style" and attributes it to "the personality of Hamlet" whose "nature can only find expression in a wholly new language." (Clemen, 106). He compares Hamlet's language and imagery with the other characters', especially Claudius' and concludes that "Hamlet's way of employing images is unique in Shakespeare's drama." (ibid).

> Hamlet does not translate the general thought into an image paraphrasing it; on the contrary, he uses the opposite method: he refers the generalization to the events and objects of the reality underlying the thought. This sense of reality finds expression in all the images Hamlet

employs. Peculiar to them all is that closeness to reality which is often carried to the point of an unsparing poignancy (ibid, 107).

CONCLUSION

Hamlet anticipates the poststructuralist and post-modernist controversy over the use of language. He is alienated by the very language, for which the structuralist approach fails to provide a convincing framework for his quest for meaning and truth. The most baffled and baffling character of Shakespeare, Hamlet is overwhelmed by words; the very arbitrariness of the word vs. world relation, or signifier vs. signified. His unpredictability, moodiness, action on impulse, not premeditated despite his too much thinking, and his methodical madness or schizophrenic behavior, all of which are manifested in his peculiar use of language, are cases of his linguistic enigma. He kills the hidden Polonius promptly on hearing his cry, as an audio-text, a false signifier, while he fails to kill the true signifier, the visio-text Claudious when he sees him praying, thus reversing the seeing/hearing dichotomy. His and other characters's *phonocentrism*, their preference of sound to sight, which is depicted throughout the play, especially in the opening scene, indicates Hamlet's (and more or less, the other characters') *thrownness* and *situatedness* in the world, which is perhaps the Eliotic so-called "objective correlative". Hamlet fails to find an "objective correlative" or signifier for his "particular emotion" or signified, and this advocates the poststructuralist/postmodern assertion of the failure or unreliability of language.

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