

Locating the Object

Sheila Power

*The bravery of his grief did put me
Into a tow'ring passion¹*

The problem of mourning is the problem of the object, to giving up the place of to *whom* and *what* one is partnered.² The mood is a *painful one*³ and entails separating one's energy, desires and wishes from the deceased. This painful love is a symptom and where there is pain there is jouissance.

It is through the Shakespearean play *Hamlet* that Lacan⁴ will pose the question of mourning and desire in developing what J-A Miller called the first logic of the *fantasm*.⁵ Throughout the play there is a lack of mourning. Hamlet has difficulty in avenging his father's death and his attachment to his mother and her unlimited jouissance is problematic.⁶ To act would be to awaken his earliest desires of which he is guilty. To grieve the phallus Hamlet must separate from his primary source of jouissance, his mother, where the phallus is placed.

Ophelia and her brother Laertes are two characters vying to ratify the role of object. Both are essential to Hamlet. Following an encounter with his father's ghost Hamlet experiences subjective disorganisation; his fantasy oscillates becoming more oriented towards the object and perversion and away from the barred subject and neurosis. The object *a* being the structural element of perversion.⁷ He debases Ophelia who ceases to exist for him as a love object, she is the return of his mother as excess.

Following a mortal blow in a duel with Laertes and at the time of Ophelia's death, Laertes shows how grief is essential to mourning. Through imaginary identification with his semblable Hamlet can mourn Ophelia, the symbol of the rejection of his desire. It is only as

¹Shakespeare, W., *Hamlet* V, 11, 78-79 cited in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VI: Desire and Its Interpretation*, ed. J-A Miller, trans. B. Fink, Cambridge: Polity, 2019, p. 288.

² Sigmund, F., "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917/1915), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV*, London: Hogarth Press, pp. 243-258.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁴ Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VI: Desire and Its Interpretation*, *op.cit.*

⁵ Miller, J.-A., "An Introduction to the Reading of Seminar V1, Desire and Its Interpretation", *Lacanian Ink* 53//54 2019, p. 103.

⁶ Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VI: Desire and Its Interpretation*, *op.cit.*, p. 398.

⁷ Miller, J.-A., "An Introduction to the Reading of Seminar V1, Desire and Its Interpretation", *op.cit.*, p.112.

an impossible object that she once again becomes the object of his desire in fantasy, he can then name himself.

Love is narcissistically structured and infers the idealised dimension. In Seminar X the status of the object changes. The problem of mourning is to maintain, at the scopic level, the bond through which desire is suspended. Hamlet shows that the work of mourning involves restoring the bond with the true object of the relation, *a*. In mourning one must separate the ideal image *i(a)* from the object *a* and the place it occupies for the subject. The place of the object has to be constituted, which is never a given. If the place of the object is restored it may be possible for another *i(a)* to take its place.

In melancholia the radical position to object *a* triumphs.⁸ The subject cannot situate himself in desire without castration, a symbolic lack marked by the phallus. In Lacan's later teachings it is marked by jouissance. "*Castration means that jouissance has to be refused in order for it to be attained on the inverse scale of the Law of desire.*"⁹

Mourning is an intolerable loss giving rise to a hole in the real, this hole provides a place onto which the missing signifier is projected.¹⁰ It is a singular painful experience and it can only be fully known to the one experiencing it.

⁸ Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. A.R. Price, Cambridge: Polity, 2014, pp. 334-336.

⁹ Lacan, J., "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire", *Écrits*, trans. B. Fink, New York/London: Norton, 2006, p.700.

¹⁰ Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VI: Desire and Its Interpretation*, *op.cit.*, pp. 336-337.