A Lacanian Reading of Hamlet and Caligula: Death Drive
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The following research rereads the concept of death drive in the chosen literary characters of Caligula and Hamlet, who possess differing positions to the crown yet share the tragic death forced by the outer environment. The chosen plays provide a well ground for practice of this subject since both plays are closed by the death of the heroes in which neither of them possess any part of direct actions. In Hamlet the mourning prince enters a shock by the supernatural visit he receives which leaves him in the search of the vengeance he stands responsible for. During the play Hamlet’s behavior and mental status leads him to eventual due to his inability to perform any act which may be a cause of distribution to his associates which creates a well formed psychological pattern for study. On the other hand, in Caligula no element of supernatural appears yet the young emperor is in great shock due to the loss of his sister, in a sadistic manner the king both seeks destruction and yet is unable to harm himself, so the bizarre and extreme behavior is reflected as a result of his current situation. This study aims to unveil the hidden links between the two plays focusing on the concepts of Jouissance, Trauma, and the Death drive.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article investigates the hidden links between the two chosen literary characters of Caligula and Hamlet from Hamlet by Shakespeare and Caligula by Camus in order to create a clear understanding of the existing similarities and differences between the texts which had been overlooked before. This research aims to unveil the relations between trauma and jouissance in an association with one another as the possible elements in the death drive. The concept of death drive in the plays although may appear contrasting and opposing to one another, yet despite the periodical composing gasp between the texts and the differing position each hero possesses to the crown, a similar pattern is seen which leads to the destruction of the heroes even though there may exists a leaner difference.

William Shakespeare was born on 23rd of April 1564 and passed away on 23rd of April 1616, he wrote not only famous plays such as Hamlet, King Lear, and The Tempest but also composed cycles of sonnets as well. Hamlet was written in an uncertain period between the 1955 and 1602, the play theme orbits around the theme of the hero as a fool which is taken from Scandinavian legends which due to its supernatural element and fairytale like nature became popular during the 17th century. The plot if the story pictures the story of a lost prince who is in a quest to publicize the truth upon his father’s death, the play ends in the death of the hero which to some extends share similarities with Camus’s play Caligula which had created a great opportunity for a comparative examination of these cases.

Albert Camus born on 7th of November 1913 and passed away on 4th of January 1960, was a well noted play writer in the school of Absurd yet he never truly accepted this label himself. The ; “the term absurd was first used to describe literary works by Albert Camus, in 1961, theater critic Martine Esslin’s book Theater of the Absurd named a movement that was already in full swing” (Galen 60). Caligula was published in 1944 for the first time, the story was based on the true history of emperor Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus Germanics who was nicknamed Caligula which had the literal meaning of little soldier boots. The main plot of the story portrays a maddened emperor by the grief of the loss he had experienced, the loss of his beloved sister who had many functions beside the sibling she was to him. The story closes with the death of Caligula himself. These two case studies will be investigated by the appliance of Lacanian theories.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Jacques Marie Émile Lacan is one of the most influential figures in psychoanalysis, he introduced many concepts including the three orders, mirrors

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stage, and other modified versions of previously presented concepts. Lacan’s first analytic appearance was in the Paris (1936) in in the congress of International Psychoanalytical Association where he presented the concept of mirror phase which to his disappointment was not received well by the audiences, latter Lacan modifies the term and present it as the concept of mirror stage. Lacan held a special place for the linguistic aspect of language and the symbolic order since he believed them as the only tool which allowed the psychologist access to the psyche and uncurious of the individual. One of Lacan’s greatest influences in the symbolic order, is as he states Saussure (Lacan, Écrits, 2001, p.117), since “Saussurean linguistics allows him to analyze how human beings exist in the symbolic order (as a typographic ambiance)” (Zwart, 2018, p.1). The other great mind whose theories had helped Lacan’s symbolic order is Claude Le’vi-Strass, “The lecture on ‘The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real’ showed the influence of Claude Le’vi-Strass”(Mijolla, 2005, p. 930). Lacan’s major concepts include the orders, other/Other, and other modified terms. The end of Lacan’s life was however a rather melancholies ending. According to International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis (2006), Lacan announces the failure of his school and publicize his will as a form of seminar and when hospitalized he refused to share his identity and was taken under the name of his personal physician (p.931).

Among many concepts introduced by Lacan this paper makes use of the concepts of trauma, jouissance, and death drive. The literal meaning of trauma is “(a wound), a term borrowed from ancient Greek, was at first used in surgery to denote a violent injury from an external cause that breached the body’s integrity.”(Mijolla, 3005, p.1800). The general definition of trauma used in psychology is stated as “a painful experience that scars psychologically” (Tyson, 2006, p. 21). Yet trauma cannot be viewed as only a singular events for what associates it is also of great importance. Trauma may result in many mental disorders including aggression, hysterias, repetitions, death drive, and jouissance.

In association with the concept of trauma is the concept of jouissance. According to Evan’s International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis (2006) the concept of jouissance had been left untranslated due to the lack on exact equivalent for it in English. The literal meaning of jouissance is pure sexual pleasure which Lacan later, in the years of 1959-1960 connects this to the death drive. Lacan addressed the malfunction of any drive which aims to harm and create destruction, as jouissance. He explains jouissance as any drive which functions beyond the pleasure principle or the in other words the laws and regulations. He believes that if there exists no boundary jouissance does not exists for it feeds of the sadistic pain-pleasure seeking of its nature (p.93-4). In other words the jouissance creates pleasure when one suffers, this pain does not necessarily need to be caused for others by the individual and the individual takes pleasure in hurting himself as well. This characteristic of jouissance is what Lacan connects to the death drive, the individual seeking the pleasure in the pain is unaware of the destruction he causes himself.

The concept of death drive with the definition given by Freud was not quit acceptable by Lacan’s logic. Freud addressed the death drive, Thanatos, which he explains an instinct which appears in association with other concepts and pushes the individual towards a tendency to reform the lost harmony. “It does not appear in isolation; its effect becomes apparent, in particular through the repetition compulsions, when a part of it is connected with Eros. Its tendency to return living creatures to the earlier inorganic state is a component of all the drives” (Mijolla, 2005, p. 371). Lacan believed such tendency in the individual as impossible he believed the death drive does not stand in opposition to life drive (Eros) but he addressed the death drive as any dive which functions beyond the pleasure principle.

3. ANALYSIS
This section focuses on the analysis of the protagonists, Hamlet and Caligula, from the chosen case studies including Hamlet the Prince of Denmark by William Shakespeare and Caligula by Albert Camus. First a background along with a short summary is presented highlighting the important events in the plot of the plays. The summary is followed by the analysis of each protagonists according to the key concepts presented.

3.1 Analysis of Hamlet
Hamlet was composed in an uncertain area between the years of 1599 to 1602, the style of the text presents remarkable similarities to Kyd’s Spanish Tragedy. The plot of the story orbits around a very popular theme among Scandinavian sorties, hero as a fool in which the prince seeks vengeance against the uncle who had murdered his father and married the widowed queen. The original manuscript which was titled Ur-Hamlet did not survive the time but was noted to be lengthier. The story opens as the young prince had entered a shock due to the death of his father and is in a traumatic situation which is heightened by the visit he receives from the ghost of his father putting the burdens of vengeance on
Hamlet’s shoulders. By this end the protagonist leads himself to the destruction by a chain of inevitable actions.

Hamlet’s character throughout the story faces a conflict which fuels his indecisive manner. By the marriage of his mother to the new king and his uncle, Claudius, Hamlet is placed in a new triangle where he desires the attention of his mother and does not receive it, this unsatisfied desire is the source of Hamlet’s aggression and aggressivity. The two rare cases where Hamlet performs any act of aggression are first where he murders Polonius and second the final act where after the death of his mother, Gertrude, he is able to the action and take his vengeance. In the first act of aggression, in queen’s room, Hamlet appears both aggressive and performs the concept of aggressivity since he seeks the attention, sympathy, and approval of his mother but instead what he realizes the fact that he stands alone and is labeled as a mad man. This fuels the pre-existing aggression within Hamlet which leads to the murder of Polonius. The concept of madness according to Foucault explain that “people were often defined as insane simply because they behaved in ways that were different from the majority or that contravened the norms of polite society. In other words, madness was a question of social and cultural definition” (Oliver, 2005, p. 7). By this definition Hamlet isn’t labeled as a mad man but as an aggressive individual who is unable to take action due to the Oedipus complex he is in.

His aggressivity is bold and clear towards Ophelia as Lacan had directly addressed it. “In this case of Hamlet, Ophelia is after this episode completely null and dissolved as a love subject. ‘I did love you once,’ Hamlet says. Henceforth his relation with Ophelia will be carried on in a sarcastic style of cruel aggression” (Lacan, Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet, 1977, p. 12). This aggression towards Ophelia is based on the fact that now Ophelia is the symbol of the reality Hamlet faces, “Ophelia is turned here into an object that is not placed in the symbolic order but rather appears in the real, no longer being part of his unconscious fantasy” (Calderón, 2015, p.6), due to the misogyny he faces as he is unable to create a balanced picture between the new images of the females present in is life. “The horror of femininity is installed along the play according to the establishment of a frontier between the characters of Ophelia, the virgin, and Gertrude, the incestuous whore” (Calderón, 2015, p. 6). By this hatred Hamlet rejects Ophelia by choice and as she is no longer an object of desire she is the one who receives the aggressivity.

Due to Hamlet’s loss of interest in his beloved he may be accused of narcissism since he is quit aggressive and does possess a tendency towards the self-destructive actions which are among the characteristics of narcissism. Both aggressivity and aggression along with the suicidal tendency are marked as the characteristics of narcissist individuals. “Narcissistic aggressivity is enacted on the level of literal violation of the body's imaginary integrity, whereas the self-mutative effects of the superego are achieved in the register of linguistic signification (Moncayo, 2008, p. 176), such aggressive behavior although witnessed in Hamlet’s behavior is yet rooted in his aggression due to the desire which he had not been able to satisfy. The Oedipus complex and the triangle in which he is trapped in is the source of Hamlet’s aggression as well as a much stronger proof against the claim of narcissism. The narcissistic individual finds the wholeness within himself and does not require an Other while hamlet throw ought the play views his mother as the new Other while “Hamlet is dominated by his Mother as a big Other, that is, as the primordial subject of his demand”(Calderón, 2015, p.5).

Hamlet’s tendency towards the self-destruction is not a result of narcissism but rather the trauma he had faced. Hamlet’s character is suicidal due the traumatic experiences he had gone throw, this tendency is shown clearly in his famous soliloquy as he states “To be, or not to be: that is the question”(Shakespeare, 1843, p.63). This reflects his suicidal desire which according to Lacan is a result of the trauma he had faced. Hamlet is unable to act upon this desire due to the Oedipus complex at the same time when he is free from the grip of the complex he is already poisoned and is out of time to take any actions to harm or destroy himself.

3.2 Analysis of Caligula
The play of Camus was inspired by the Emperor Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus Germanics. The emperor gains the nickname of Caligula as he accompanied his father’s armies in battels. The emperor’s behavior, according to Sandison’s article “The Madness of the Emperor Caligula. Heinemann”, had been described as strange and abnormal, such was due to two main reasons including the devastation of breaking free from his old image as a child and the mental illness from which he suffered (p.6). Camus taken this bizarre character and used it as his hero in the play. Caligula was first published in 1944, the story of emperor Caligula who is mournful due to the death of his beloved sister Drusilla whom happened to be the beloved of Caligula and also his object of desire. By the death of his sister Caligula become cruller by day he pushes and breaks all
norms and boundaries of the society to the point where he is destroyed by his courtiers.

Caligula’s inability to love any other but the royal blood, his own blood, places him in a situation where he is labeled as a narcissistic person. In the play he directly addresses himself as the goddess of love Venus, “CALIGULA [ amiably]: I’m Venus toda... on given to that constant desire in the subject to break through the pleasure principle towards the thing and a certain excess jouissance; thus, Jouissance is “the path towards death” (Evans, 2006, p. 94). Lacan argues that the death drive is not a separate drive but any drive which functions beyond the pleasure principle and seeks destruction in order to feel the joy which is fueled by the sadistic nature of jouissance. “The concept of Jouissance has always been associated with the two concepts of destruction and pleasure both of which appear in a man with Jouissance, the individual aims to push his cruelty and his boundaries as far as he may since he experiences a greater loss” (Ghasemi, , 2018, p. 3). The same concepts appears in the manner of the emperor, Caligula due to his narcissistic nature is unable to harm himself yet seeks destruction as a result of both his jouissance and narcissism. In such case the emperor unable to harm himself pushes the environment to take the action and destroy him. Along the play Caligula is conscious of the plotting of courtiers yet he does not take action for the destruction is what he truly seeks, Caligula directly addresses the matter “By the way, when I came in just now, you were hatching a plot, weren’t you? A nice bloody little HELICON ! Yes, yes . . . . Now listen, please. Do you know there's a plot being hatched against your life? A plot?” (Camus, 1958, p. 26).

4. DISCUSSION
The concept of death drive had been applied to the chosen case studies including Hamlet by Shakespeare and Caligula by Camus. In the case of Hamlet’s character he is not narcissistic due to the fact that he had found a new Other who places him in a new Oedipus complex in which he does not get the attention of the desired Others. The aggression and aggressivity observed in Hamlet’s manner is the result of his unsatisfied desires which are shown and reflected in both Hamlet’s actions and his speech or in other words his use of symbolic order. Hamlet’s character does seek destruction due to the traumatic experiences and his current traumatic situation in which he is yet he is unable to satisfy his needs since he is controlled by his desire for the Other or in other words the queen, Gertrude. Hamlet is released from this grip at the very end of the play but it’s too late.

In the case of Camus’s hero, Caligula, the emperor is narcissist for he had lost the only person whom with he shared blood and for that was seen worthy of his love since he viewed himself as a god and others as ordinary men, by this view the emperor now is labelled as narcissist and possesses aggression and suicidal tendency. Aggression is greatly witnessed in the actions of the emperor and he expresses his interest on the subject freely. Caligula also openly states the fact which he takes pleasure in harming others and he crosses many boundaries taking pleasure in harming the subjects and courtiers which is labeled by the concept of jouissance. Since the concept of jouissance is the essence of the death drive due to the fact that it is addressed as any drive which
malfunctions and goes beyond the pleasure principle, the behavior of the emperor does seek destruction both due to the jouissance or death drive and as a result of his narcissistic suicidal tendency in which result’s Caligula is unable to take action and pushes the environment to destroy him.

5. CONCLUSION
The current research had aimed on unveiling the similarities and differentiating elements affecting the death drive of the heroes according to the concepts of aggression, narcissism, and death drive in the chosen case studies, Hamlet and Caligula, although they possess differing positions to the crown yet share the tragic death forced by the outer environment. In both case studies neither of the heroes perform a suicide and are destroyed by the environment, as Caligula is assassinated by his courtiers and Hamlet is murdered by his uncle. In the case of Hamlet the prince is mournful for the death of his father, seeks destruction of himself and his uncle, Claudius, which leads to an inevitable chain of actions which presents Hamlet’s character as indecisive and aggressive. Hamlet’s behavior leads him towards his own destruction where in the last seen of the play he is poisoned and murdered. According to the former analysis Hamlet’s character is not narcissist for he had found a new Other, still his character is suicidal and aggressive. The aggressivity and aggression is a result of Hamlet’s unsatisfied desire for the Other as well as his indecisive personality while his death drive on the other hand is rooted in the traumatic experiences he had gone through.

In the case of Camus’s hero, Caligula, the story presents Caligula as a maddened emperor who had lost his lover and his sister, Drusilla, which in a series of actions the story leads to the destruction of the hero by the courtiers and his lover Chaerea. Caligula’s character is narcissist since he had lost the one person he shared blood with and he saw worthy of his love, this narcissism results in in aggression and suicidal tendency which is the cause of his aggressivity and aggression and his inability to harm himself. The concept of death drive is present in the behavior of the emperor since the concept of jouissance is witnessed, in other words Caligula seeks destruction but due to his narcissistic state is unable to perform the suicide so he pushes the environment to accomplish this task for him. It may be concluded that the heroes were both aggressive but under differing influences, the destruction seeking manner of Hamlet was a result of his trauma while Caligula was controlled by his narcissism and jouissance. They were both unable to commit suicide but by differing reasons, Hamlet had faced the desire of his new Other and Caligula as a narcissist could not directly harm himself.

REFERENCES


