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Staging violence in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: From the theatrics of the mind, the image and the stage to the creation of the meta-self

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Abstract:
Violence in William Shakespeare's Hamlet *follows stage-managed theatrics at the level of the language and images used, the construction of a theatre that comments on theatre, and of staged minds. The theatrics of images, sound, stage and mind are necessary steps for Hamlet to create a meta-self. Metatheatre and the grotesque are deeply connected to violence; their association makes what the research calls the meta-self. The article combines different theoretical concepts not commonly used simultaneously. The alliance between the carnivalesque and the metatheatrical reveals the theatrics of the stage while dealing with violence. The theatrics of violence are present at the level of performance, language and images. The dynamics of violence constructed upon theatrics and staging prove that the mind of Hamlet is staged. Baudrillard's concepts of "hyperreality", "traversing the self" and "holographic attempts" allow us to conclude that Hamlet reaches a "meta-self". The Meta-self is a traversing self that challenges society and mocks over-confidence; it operates as a mirror, a crossing-thinking self in constant rehearsal and reassessment of the certitudes of humans.*

Writers and critics have detailed full accounts of crime and retribution in the Elizabethan age throughout the centuries. Liza Picard, in her article "Crime and Punishment in Elizabethan England" (2016), gives a complete account of thieves and pickpockets operating in Saint Paul's Cathedral and different other sorts of misbehaviour faced by punishment ranging from minor sentences such as carting to vigorous ones such as torture, burning and hanging. Renaissance theatre deeply echoed the anxieties of the age; it was mainly concerned with matters related to

authority, power, stability and threats, along with aesthetic experimentations in presenting those issues. Violence, bloodshed and onstage stabbing were widespread in Renaissance theatre and much appreciated by Elizabethan audiences. William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1588-1593), *Hamlet* (1601), *Macbeth* (1606) and *King Lear* (1606), but also other plays by his contemporaries such as Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish* Tragedy (1582-1592), George Peele's *The Battle of Alcazar* (1591) and Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* (1592) among a plethora of other plays, make obvious this idea. In *Titus Andronicus*, for example, the main character addresses the audience by howling: "Witness my knife's sharp point" (Shakespeare 5.3. 64). As for *Macbeth*, the dagger in act 1, scene 2 plays both a symbolic and a visual role in heightening the tragedy. In *Hamlet,*[1] William Shakespeare not only relies on the theatrical and the graphic to boost suspense and excitement and to re-enforce the cathartic, he also resorts to the use of a great variety of images and carefully chosen verbal register when painting violence in his plays. In many instances, as the present article will demonstrate, his characters express themselves graphically rather than abstractly. As an example, the ghost of King Hamlet graphically describes the horrors of purgatory and the horrendous treacherous assassination he has been the victim of at the hands of his brother Claudius.

Undoubtedly, critics of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* could condemn the degree of violence in the play. Nevertheless, we notice that Shakespeare entertains his audiences via the theatricalization of violence.[2] The concept of violence could be very inspiring and proves itself challenging if it is treated from a different angle, i.e. to consider violence as a theatrical means necessary for stagecraft more than a social, ethical phenomenon. The purpose of the present article is, thus, not to focus on violence per se or to investigate it from a classical perspective by showing its manifestations and roots; it will be rather an attempt to search for the common thread, the guiding line and the currents according to which violence is implemented in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. It will attempt to demonstrate that Shakespeare uses combinations each time he deals with violence in the play. The analysis will try to show how violence is stage-managed in *Hamlet*, a play that celebrates theatre. An empirical focus on the text, while using combined theories, namely metatheatre, the carnivalesque, and the concepts of hyperreality and simulacra, proves itself innovative, challenging and fruitful in tracing a common thread allowing audiences and readers to understand violence in *Hamlet*. It is, indeed, the combination of theories that will enable the present research to suggest new notions, such as the concept of meta-self.

Three major parts of the article will investigate the staged violence in *Hamlet*. The first part will reveal how images and language in the play are theatricalized; the second part will

combine metatheatre and the carnivalesque, two concepts which are usually investigated separately from each other, to show the theatrics of the stage. The final part will demonstrate that violent dilemmas in *Hamlet* follow the principle of the theatrics of the mind. A scrutiny of the theatrics of stage, images and mind will prove that the play displays theatrical dynamics leading to the creation of the meta-self. The term *theatrics* refers to the various techniques, conventions and elements used to create a dramatic performance, such as acting, stage design, costumes, lighting and sound. Theatrics includes the use of gestures, facial expressions and body language to convey emotions and actions; the use of stage design and props to create a believable environment; the use of costumes and makeup to create believable characters; the use of lighting to create mood and atmosphere; and the use of sound to enhance the overall experience of the performance. Theatricality can also refer to the artistic representation of emotions, actions and events on stage, in which the actors use their skills to create a believable representation of the characters and the story. Theatricality can also involve the use of conventions, such as breaking the fourth wall, in which actors speak directly to the audience and conventions of the genre, such as the use of soliloquies in Shakespearean plays. The research's understanding of theatrics goes a step further by considering that performance and performativity could be mental.

The theatrics of images

Although R. A. Foakes in *Shakespeare and Violence* maintains the idea that "the primary act of violence or primal scene" (Foakes, 2002, p. 16) is rather unprompted and without any possible explanations, and even though he underlines how "gratuitous violence" (Foakes, 2002, p. 17) is appealing, rottenness, corruption and callousness in *Hamlet* are directly related to ethical and Biblical transgressions; they are transcribed on stage for theatrical and visual reasons. In *Hamlet*, imagery and theatricality are closely related because they create a vivid and evocative representation of the play's themes and characters. Imagery, such as the use of metaphors and symbols, helps to illustrate the psychological and emotional states of the characters, while theatricality, through the use of stagecraft and performance, brings these images to life in front of an audience. Together, they create a rich and immersive experience for the audience and help convey the play's complex themes and ideas. The play, indeed, includes what the present article calls the theatrics of images, where violent metaphors, offensive graphic language and a gothic-like setting and atmosphere are staged amid chaos. Language, imagery and metaphors become signifiers that serve the performative. The first step will collect expressions pointing to disease and corruption to interpret them, and in the second

step, from the graphic and visual lens. Hence, one can remember the ideas of Roland Barthes, who, in *Critical Essays*, comments on theatricality by declaring that:

> "what we have, then, is a real informational polyphony, which is what theatricality is: a density of signs […] Every performance is an extremely dense semantic act: the nature of the theatrical sign, whether analogical, symbolic, or conventional, the denotation and connotation of the message – all these fundamental problems of semiology are present in the theatre." (Barthes, 2000, p. 261-262)

According to Barthes, theatricality is a fundamental aspect of human existence. It is present in all forms of communication, not just in the theatre. Barthes argues that theatricality creates a distance between the performer and the audience, allowing the performer to express themselves without being fully present at the moment. He believes that this distance, or "gap", between performer and audience creates a sense of unreality that allows a deeper exploration of the human condition. Barthes also believes that theatre has the power to reveal the truth about society and the human condition through the use of cruelty and violence on stage. He considers the use of cruelty as a way to disrupt the audience's preconceptions and force them to confront uncomfortable truths about themselves and the world around them. However, in the above quotation, Barthes focuses only on the semiotics of theatre and language as a semantic act solely during performances. My idea is to go a step further and consider the theatricalization of verbal signifiers even before the act of performance itself. Language in *Hamlet* is staged even before the performance; it generates a tempo and a rhythm affecting the stage.

Shakespeare, at the beginning of his play, does not limit himself to portraying indicators of the disturbance of the natural order to pave the way for the coming tragic events; he paints, through foreshadowing, a palpable turbulent atmosphere on stage. Instantly, apprehension and tension permeate. There is no fluidity in the exchanges between the soldiers, who seem breathless. Sentence structures are fragmented, and interrogations dominate the exchange between them. Tension mounts due to the diegetic sounds of the clock striking twelve and the cockcrow when the sky starts to have its reddish colour by the end of act 1, scene 1, as Horatio declares it. Shakespeare reinforces the loss of order by injecting a register based on chaotic visual images where the castle platform is dark, cold and freezing, and foggy weather chills the bones of the soldiers on it. The striking of bells announces a long cold night ending with the morning cockcrow that brings with it release. A deeper focus on the decay and corruption

images will be discussed in detail. However, at this level of analysis, it is necessary to insist on the idea that the question of violence is also treated from a moral and a sexual perspective. Prince Hamlet, in his first soliloquy in act 1, scene 2, condemns, in an outfit of mortification and invocation of divinity, the incestuous relationship between his mother and his uncle, evoking a lusty goat-like mother "hanging" on his uncle like a she-goat devoured by the sin of appetite. The graphic image Hamlet's words deliver is almost staged.

> "Heaven and earth,
> Must I remember? Why she would hang on him
> As if increase of appetite had grown
> By what it fed on;" (Shakespeare, 1982, 1.2.142-145)

A few lines after, in the same soliloquy, he strongly fulminates using an array of sibilant sounds reminiscent of a snake, a symbol of Satan and possibly that which produced the poison that has assassinated his father: "She married—O most wicked speed! To post / With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!" (Shakespeare, 1982, 1.2.156-157). In the above lines, Hamlet utters for the first time the word incest and emphasizes the graphic, almost pornographic ritual of incest through his use of the expression "sheets" (Shakespeare, 1.2.158) that blatantly designates the bed where incest has taken place. It is no surprise, then, that what is known as "the closet scene" in act three, scene four, takes place in Gertrude's bedroom, a place of intimacy and a scene likely to be read via a Freudian Oedipal lens.[3] During this scene, still unable to digest the immoral bestial-like relationship, Hamlet addresses his mother, expressing disgust, violence and bitterness: "Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed / And batten on this moor? (Shakespeare, 1982, 3.4.66-67).

Indeed, the catastrophic happenings in *Hamlet* stem from the breach of the Platonist/Aristotelian concept, developed later by Renaissance philosophers, of the *Scala Naturae* (Great Chain of Being) since the play is atrociously about incest, fratricide and regicide. Still, William Shakespeare gives, in addition to that initial message, a special mood that colours the tragic situation through the overabundant use of violent images of decay, rottenness and corruption. Jacqueline Vanhoutte comments on the interest Elizabethan writers had in injecting the element of disease into their artistic and literary creations, emphasizing the richness of such an idea in exploring the mind, the body and the soul: "Elizabethan playwrights and pamphleteers continued to find the disease a convenient device for exploring the

relationships between mind and body, self and community, and soul and God" (Vanhoutte, 2012, p. 393).

Violent visual images of diseases reinforce the cruelty of the tragic atmosphere in the play. The graphic is integral to staging the play; its intensity and interest are as important as the characters' performance. The opening scene of *Hamlet* introduces on stage a sentinel who is "sick at heart" (Shakespeare, 1982, 1.1.9), and though audiences do not know the exact reasons for his sickness, they already expect the worst to come in the play. Gertrude also repeats the term "sick" in act 4, scene 5 (Shakespeare, 1982, 4.5.16), insisting that it is her soul and not her body that is ill. She must be aware of the weight of the adulterous relationship with Claudius. Hamlet uses the expression "blister" to qualify the virtue of his mother. In usual situations, soldiers and sentinels cannot express their feelings. However, through Marcellus, Shakespeare creates one of the most famous quotations across ages: "something is rotten in the State of Denmark" (Shakespeare, 1.4.90). The critical reception of *Hamlet* recognizes the permeation of corruption and anarchy in the play. One needs to focus on the early soliloquies of the prince to realize how he compares Denmark to "an unweeded garden" (Shakespeare, 1.2.35) and how he ascertains that humans have become like "things rank and gross in nature" (Shakespeare, 1.2. 36). Moreover, it is worthy to note that the vocabulary of decay is not only proper to Hamlet, the ghost, who is likely to be a victim of human atrocities uses a vocabulary pertaining to corruption such as "foul" to qualify murder (1.2.27). The lexical register of the ghost is not arbitrary; Shakespeare associates him with pain and suffering. It, thus, dwells on the suffering of the fire of purgatory in a graphic way:

> "I am thy father's spirit,
> Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,
> And for the day confin'd to fast in fires," (Shakespeare, 1982, 1.4.10-13)

Manifestations of violence are undeniable in the play. An exciting area of investigation is to build a bridge between the text and the context with an awareness of the historicity of the play that echoes the anxieties of the age. In this vein, Caroline Spurgeon equates the overall atmosphere in the play with the political situation in the kingdom: "We discover that the idea of an ulcer or tumour, as descriptive of the wholesome condition of Denmark normally, is, on the whole, the dominant one" (Spurgeon, 2001, p. 316). It is possible to conclude, thus, that Shakespeare exploits the idea of violence from all angles, moral, psychological, social and political.

There exists in *Hamlet* a tandem built on dismay and rottenness. Dismay relates to violence; meanwhile, rottenness relates to the effect of violence. This dual combination is due to the nature of any misfortune. A tragedy is about the disturbance of the natural order. Thus, chaos is connected to degeneration. The tandem of turmoil and disease serves to both reflect and comment on the state of Denmark and the characters within it. The play begins with Denmark in a state of chaos, with the unexpected death of the king, the hurried remarriage of the queen, and the prince's descent into melancholy. This chaos is mirrored in the characters, who are plagued by internal conflicts and struggles. As the play progresses, this inner turmoil escalates, and the imagery of disease becomes increasingly prominent. This imagery further emphasizes the corrupt and decaying state of both the political and personal realms. Hamlet, for example, rejects the immoral incestuous and adulterous marriage between his uncle and his mother and calls it "ulcerous" (Shakespeare, 1982, 3.4.149). In *Hamlet*, corruption is a recurring motif that encompasses the physical and moral decay of the characters and the state. The decay is symbolized through the imagery of rot and disease, which reflects the moral degeneration of the characters and the kingdom. The ghost of Hamlet's father tells the prince about the corruption and foul play that led to his death, setting the stage for the play's central conflict. Hamlet's journey to uncover the truth and seek revenge becomes a meditation on the corruption that permeates his world and the consequences of such corruption. The characters' moral degeneration is also revealed through their actions and relationships as they engage in deceit, betrayal and murder. Ultimately, the play portrays the destructive effects of corruption and the importance of justice and morality.

Hamlet's soliloquies and statements reflect an ill-being and a rejection of his world. For example, he shows his frustration because of a world turning upside down with no respect for moral and social norms, such as the repulsive proximity between the common people and the aristocracy and the friction this proximity can create: "the toe of the peasant comes so near to the heel of the courtier, he galls his kibe" (Shakespeare, 4.3.9). The quote suggests that the peasant's foot is so close to the courtier's heel that it rubs against it and causes a painful sore, symbolizing the tension and conflict that can arise between the different social classes. The phrase "to gall his kibe" means to irritate or cause pain, and in this context, it highlights the clash between the two classes and the discomfort that can result from their proximity. The imagery Hamlet uses is vivid; it explores Denmark's social and political disintegration. Apart from the injection of the chaos/sickness binary, Shakespeare taints violence with cutting-edge rich pictorial imagining. The ghost, who is likely to appear from "sulphurous and tormenting flames" (5.1.4) when it encounters Hamlet and before summoning him to filial duty, delivers

an exhaustive account of his assassination and confers to it theatrical, visual and graphic dimensions. The thorough account of the poison advancing through the king's veins is among Hamlet's most violent pictorial descriptions. The ghost takes its time explaining how the venom causes his blood to be curdled and his skin to be transformed from a smooth royal body to a corpse covered by crust. The effect of the ghost's words on Hamlet and the audience must be visible.

> "And in the porches of my ears did pour
> The leperous distilment […]
> Swift as quicksilver it courses through
> The natural gates and alleys of the body." (Shakespeare, 1982, 1.5. 63-64-66)

The portrayal of violence goes beyond the graphic and the pictorial to reach an allegorical religious dimension. Vanhoutte emphasizes the organic link between the anti-ethical acts of fratricide and regicide on the one hand and their violent consequences on the other. In view of this, she builds an analogy between Claudius and the Biblical figure Cain, the commander of the first murder. At the same time, Vanhoutte shows her awareness of theatricalization as a construct that goes beyond performance to reach a whole world order:

> If Claudius's 'murther most foul' (1.5.27) has world-shattering effects, allusions to Genesis also frame the fratricide as a foundational act, which ushers in a theatricalised world order, made possible by the soul's divorce from the body... One medieval interpretative tradition held that the mark of Cain, designed by God to signal the first fratricide's perpetual damnation, was a horn in the forehead (39). What then of Claudius, guilty not only of a 'brother's murther' (3.2.38) but also of 'luxury and damned incest' (1.5.83)? (Vanhoutte, 2012, p. 397)

Claudius has been accused of treachery, villainy[4] and lasciviousness.[5] The ghost even further considers him a devil taking the shape of the serpent and sneaking into the Garden of Eden, causing the loathing of "the royal bed of Denmark" (Shakespeare, 1982, 1.5.82).

> "'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,

A serpent stung me—so the whole ear of Denmark
Is by a forged process of my death
Rankly abus'd." (Shakespeare, 1982, 1.5.35-38)

The appearance of the ghost, its visual impact, and staging possibilities are intriguing. The ghost is an alien who does not belong to our world; its presence is a witness to a chaotic world tainted by the smell of blood and treachery. Figures from "the undiscovere'd country, from whose bourn / No traveller returns" (Shakespeare, 3.1.79) appear and give an account of the purgatorial suffering. Shakespeare problematizes the ghost within an atmosphere of turmoil. The ethical code of the ghost echoes the degree of confusion in Denmark; it is a mass of stunning contradictions. Indeed, during its encounter with Hamlet in act 1, scene 5, the ghost gives Hamlet a battery of messages. It, on the one hand, rejects Hamlet's pity and then terrifies him with the projection of divine wrath on the other. It also considers murder "foul" and then asks Hamlet to kill. It dwells explicitly on the sexual looseness of Gertrude and then asks Hamlet to spare her and leave her destiny to divine justice. Astonishingly, the ghost does not rely on the justice of God since it exhorts Hamlet to take revenge and save the family's honour. In her article "Shakespeare's Sad Tale for Winter", Catherine Belsey ascertains that: "Ghosts suspend the rules of logic just as they break the laws of nature. They belong to the past, to a history that should have closed with their death, yet they reappear to trouble the present and change the future" (Belsey, 2010, p. 5).

The ghost, its ambiguous description sometimes as "a guilty thing" (Shakespeare, 1982, 1.1.148), some other times as "majestical" (1.1.143) or as a "spirit of health or goblin damned" (1.4.40) during other instances, is a token of the unnatural and the chaotic. Its presence and the circumstances in which it appears are marked by an unhealthy atmosphere of disease and contagion. Violent pictures of soreness and corruption stem from ethical transgressions; the throne of Denmark is sullied by adultery, fratricide and regicide; Denmark is in a frenzied preparation for war at the beginning of the play, and the whole world turns upside down. In *Hamlet*, imagery is an essential aspect of the play's theatricality. The play is full of vivid imagery used to create atmosphere, convey emotions, and advance the plot.

The theatrics of the stage: Metatheatre and the carnivalesque

One of the most suitable means for Shakespeare to portray chaos is his implantation of the theatrics of violence through a skilful combination of the carnivalesque and metatheatre. *Hamlet* has been dealt with, in the past, from the perspective of metatheatre; previous studies

have also covered the carnivalesque in the play. However, combining the two concepts in one piece of research and investigating their effects in relation to the tragedy in *Hamlet* is challenging.

The present subsection explores such a possibility which will prove enlightening. During the bawdy songs of the mad Ophelia in act 4, scene 5 and the gravediggers' scene in act 5, scene 1, the grotesque folk humour, the vulgar and the daring sexual overtones, laughter and chaos become a staged spectacle since the low comic characters, their songs, their mimicry, riddling and verbal gaming do not only point to the vanity and the hollowness of the world order of Denmark and its court, they, indeed, heighten metatheatre and emphasize the power of performance in staging violence. Metatheatre stresses not only the reflexivity of theatre but the artificiality and, thus, the triviality of life, as Lionel Abel claims:

> "Metatheatre is a convenient name for the quality of force in a play that challenges theatre's claim to be simply realistic, to be nothing but a mirror in which we view the actions and sufferings of characters like ourselves [...] It may end by making us aware of life's uncanny likeness to art or illusion by calling attention to the strangeness, artificiality of the life we live." (Abel,1963, p. 133)

Phyllis Gorfain in "Towards a Theory of Play and the Carnivalesque in *Hamlet*" sums up the extraordinary richness of a patchwork of mixtures between forms, registers and modes in the play for the sake of undermining dominant apparatuses of power. She asserts that:

> "Through [sic] stories, role-playing, parodying discourses of others, performing a play (including a dumb show) and a speech extracted from a play, songs and other prefabricated forms of speaking, citational texts and scripts, characters find speech and performance genres with which to express, displace and reshape their anger, griefs [...] subversions and containment of others." (Gorfain, 1998, p. 156)

Gorfain has covered the different areas where the carnivalesque manifestations can take a form either at the level of characters as theatrical beings or as agonizing souls or at the level of the text, the language and the dramaturgy. Concretely, the absurdity of clownish, typically marginalized characters points to the illusory aspirations of kings spending their time fighting for lands or fame, forgetting the cruel reality of death awaiting them. Metatheatre as a spectacle acquires a powerful dimension since it intertwines with the carnivalesque. Silenced voices from

the margin mock Claudius, King Hamlet, Alexander and Caesar; they underlie the vanity of humans and bring to the fore a brilliant combination of the grotesque and the theatrical in a violent spectacle. Political messages are violently staged then. In sequences like the gravediggers' scene, comic low marginal characters highlight the contradictions of the court and stress its limitations. Their message is startling and poignant, and the code through which it is delivered is theatricalized. The gravediggers work and sing amid "pocky corses" (Shakespeare, 1982, 5.1.160) and stinking bones, making fun of the dead, riddling and cracking jokes in a deeply petrifying and hilarious scene. Act 5, scene 1, stages death with props and music, and the gravediggers' scene is very comparable to the *happening*, to borrow the expression of Allan Kaprow and the jargon of theatre where elements are combined and staged.[6] Diegetic singing astonishingly shrieks in a graveyard. The place of death has become a stage for a spectacle where the skull of Yorrick is held by a theatre man, filling the scene as a powerful iconic *memento mori* (reminder of death). Songs are about the shortness of life and the "clutch" (5.1) and "claws" (5.1) of cruel death. Horatio interrupts Hamlet's epiphanic experience, which is about to contribute to the reincarnation of the prince into a new being with a broader sense of justice. Horatio's intervention strikes a discord with Hamlet's mood since he signals the stinking status of a graveyard full of corpses. With an exhilarating mocking tone, he addresses his friend as follows: "Hamlet: Dost thou think Alexander looked o' this fashion in the earth? / Horatio: E'en so. / Hamlet: And smelt so? Pah!" (5.1.191-194). The scene offers exciting possibilities for studying it from the perspective of the theatrical happening. However, the focus of the present article is not on this theatrical form; future investigations will cover this aspect. Our interest in this subsection is to emphasize the playwright's thoughtful choice of mixing the carnivalesque and the metatheatrical while dealing with violence. Such a choice serves a carefully set pattern since Shakespeare skilfully combines the grotesque, the carnivalesque and the metatheatrical to undermine the power paradigm in his kingdom. Hamlet, the metatheatrical character, feigning an "antic disposition" (1.5.173), harshly mocks the entity of power. His speech is violent and disgusting but enigmatic and poignant. The carnivalesque mixed with metatheatre becomes a game where responses are staccato, answers are oblique, messages are cryptic, bodies are exposed, jokes are cracked, and songs are performed. Interestingly, all the previously mentioned facts occur in the middle of chaos, where violence culminates, and agony becomes disturbing. The quotation below holds even harsh criticism of the historic Popish Catholic religious congregations; it is a carnivalesque instance that subverts religious power. To the inquisitive interrogative tone of Claudius inquiring about Polonius, Hamlet uses the image of worms eating a dead body to symbolize death and the inevitability of decay. He argues

that regardless of one's social status or wealth, death will come for everyone, and the same fate will ultimately consume all. Hamlet highlights that death is the great equalizer and that all will be subject to its rule. He goes on to say that all creatures, including humans, exist to feed others and that even the rich and powerful will eventually become food for maggots.

> "Claudius: Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?
> Hamlet: At supper.
> Claudius: At supper where?
> Hamlet: Not where he eats, but where he is eaten. A certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet. We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service—two dishes, but to one table. That's the end.[7]
> Claudius: Alas, alas!
> Hamlet: A man may fish with the worm that hath eat [sic] of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.
> Claudius: What dost you mean by this?
> Hamlet: Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar." (Shakespeare, 1982, 4.3.18-32)

Surprisingly, the most violent behaviour of Hamlet occurs only after watching a performance or while commenting on a performance. Hamlet proves himself to be capable of being euphoric and delivering "wild and whirling words" during his soliloquies and in the space of the play-within-a-play. Thus, he releases himself from the ethics of his society in a subliminal act, only to become a metatheatrical being when he forges for himself a space, a stage where he can practise. It is, indeed, through these moments of theatricality that Hamlet experiences emancipation. His ultimate act of revenge does not consist in raising his sword "for a fantasy and trick of fame" (4.4.61); it is neither "to fight for a plot" (4.4.62); nor for an "eggshell" (4.4.53); his final act of revenge is to exorcize the father, the mother, the ghost, the monarchy and everything belonging to this world and to create a meta-self with a broader sense of justice. Hamlet's release is instead to comment on a good play, a good actor and to supply a distinguished definition of theatre, performance, and acting comparable to Aristotle's about tragedy in his book *Poetics* (Halliwell & Aristotle, 1998). In the following lines, we have

Hamlet the actor, becoming Hamlet the spectator even more; he turns into a director who reflects on theatre and acting:

> "Is it not monstrous that this player here,
> But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
> Could force his soul so to his own conceit
> That from her working all his visage wann'd,
> Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
> A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
> With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing!
> For Hecuba!
> What's Hecuba to him, or he to her,
> That he should weep for her? What would he do
> Had he the motive and cue for passion
> That I have? He would drown the stage with tears,
> And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
> Make mad the guilty and appal the free,
> Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
> The very faculties of eyes and ears." (Shakespeare, 1982, 2.2.545-560)

In the above lines, Hamlet, with the eye of a critic and the tongue of an expert, defines the qualities of a play and qualifies stage performance as dream-like, where feelings and emotions are crucial. He emphasizes the fusion of the soul and the visage. He pays attention to the morphology of the performer, his/her eyes, attitude, voice, and passion for creating a cathartic effect and for amazing the eye and the ear of the audience. Here also, Hamlet emphasizes Brechtian and Beckettian elements of estrangement, resistance and alienation. Shakespeare has offered the world of literature a unique, refined and magnificent definition of a theatrical performance in the above lines that could serve as a landmark for any theatre critic and play director. More surprisingly, in an ironically delusional attempt to be resolute, Hamlet invents a revenge plan; he decides to trap the Machiavellian cold-blooded Claudius, not by calling for a duel but rather by concocting a play, a performance, a dumb show, and a play-within-a-play. Like Doctor Faustus, in his senile desire to become eternal, Hamlet, in a surge of theatrical fits, sinks further into proving himself incapable of committing violent deeds. "The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King" (Shakespeare, 2.2. 600-601). In his staging of

the play Hamlet, Peter Brooke grasps the prince's impotence at committing a bloody murder and expressionistically stages his hero holding a stick rather than a dagger. At the same time, he is about to kill Claudius in his prayers. Hamlet's tool of revenge is not a sword but rather a stage.

Act 3, scene 2 stages incest, death, treason and murder. The play-within-a-play and the dumb show, which is a mimed version of the murder, is followed by a performance of the *Murder of Gonzago* and preceded, a few scenes earlier, by an impromptu from the Trojan Wars depicting Queen Hecuba mourning the death of King Priam, theatricalizing murder and stage acting and deception literally. The play-within-a-play is about the power of performance and the danger of performing; it is also about a staged expression of murder. On stage, characters perform a meta-murder,[8] one that has been graphically described in an earlier scene by the ghost. It is as if readers and audiences are witnessing the life cycle of a performance going step by step from page to stage. One can talk, thus, about the transmigratory nature of the dramatic text. The transmigratory nature of the dramatic text functions when the written dramatic text goes beyond, traverses the initial, the real, and takes life and shape(s) either on stage(s) or across cultures. It is a culminating moment and a necessary step in theatrics. Focusing on the life cycle of the performance, audiences witness Hamlet in agony as a director who comments on murder and stages it. The dumb show and *The Murder of Gonzago*, thus, become self-conscious and creative performances of a betrayal from a death story initially narrated by the ghost, medially reflected upon and rehearsed and performed during the impromptu by the company of players then, eventually, directed, staged and commented upon by Hamlet in act 3, scene 2. Consequently, one can talk about a whole set process composed of scripting, rehearsing, acting, and staging, then watching all this within the space of *Hamlet* the play. Death is mimed, enacted, commented upon and observed during those scenes.

When on stage, the tragedy is mirrored, the poison is poured into the ear of the king character, and the tension is palpable among the actors/spectators; Hamlet becomes extraordinarily excited and loud-mouthed to the point that Claudius feels irritated and interrupts the show. Hamlet cannot even restrain himself from committing digressions and mounting, by himself, another spectacle within the lap of the play-within-a-play by becoming boisterous and punctuating the show with unpleasant eerie comments. Theatrics, at this level, reach a *mise en abyme*,[9] a situation where, in the fashion of Russian dolls, we have a play, a rehearsal, a dumb show, a play-within-a-play, and Hamlet's euphoria, which is a performance itself; all of the performances mentioned earlier stage death. Indeed, the whole situation stages brutal deeds, fierce emotions, and violent reactions. The theatrics of violence where the psychotic Hamlet

exhilarates, puns and speaks in riddles, and the cold, calculating murderer Claudius is startled, and assassination is staged strikes a chord in a tragedy overwhelmingly violent where relief is needed by means of the theatrical. The prince, in grief, remains during the play as a theatrical being, despite the violence existing in a world that Hamlet rejects. Despite his desire to be transformed into vapour or to reach peace of mind in the afterlife, Hamlet is kept alive by practising his favourite pastime, commenting on theatre, directing a performance or performing theatrical roles. Apart from the play-within-a-play, or the scene from the Trojan War, Hamlet enjoys playing a surgeon willing to "tent" Claudius "to the quick" (2.2 550). The phrase means to probe or touch someone sensitively or painfully. In the context of the play, it likely refers to figuratively touching someone in a sensitive spot, such as their emotions or weaknesses, to cause pain or distress. The phrase is an example of the use of vivid, concrete language that underscores the psychological and emotional tension running throughout the play. The surgical imagery flows in *Hamlet*. While commenting on the adulterous and incestuous marriage of Gertrude and Claudius, Hamlet refers to the superficial nature of any attempt to cover up or hide a deeper problem. He uses the metaphor of an ulcerous place and an open sore to name decaying things. He argues that merely skinning or covering the surface of the problem will not solve it, as corruption will still be present and will continue to spread. Hamlet suggests that corruption is working its way deeper into the problem, infecting it from within.

> "It will but skin and film the ulcerous place,
> Whiles rank corruption, mining all within,
> Infects unseen." (Shakespeare, 1982, 3.4.148-150)

Another combination of carnivalesque and metatheatrical dynamics where the theatrics of violence are unambiguous, the grotesque performed, riddles and cryptic messages are uttered, puns are used, and the body is staged through the madness of Ophelia that takes place in act 4, scene 5 and which comes before her staged suicide. The theatrics of violence for Ophelia, though they serve theatre possibilities, play a different role. Pain and suffering, here, are not relative to Hamlet; they rather pertain to a female controlled and female escaping control. However, it seems puzzling that a female character goes mad because of a father assassinated in a patriarchal society, where fathers rule daughters. The suicide of Ophelia, another climactic violent episode, is a preliminary of a subsequent spectacle where the female body is staged and exposed grotesquely before death; it is a culminating instance of violence where Ophelia bawdily performs the agony of a female betrayed by males. There is an erotic

melancholy in the performance she delivers. Indeed, the song she performs about Saint Valentine's Day is about sexual love and of a coarse, challenging and daring tone for a Renaissance female: "By cock, they are to blame. / Quoth she, before you tumbled me, / You promised me to wed" (4.5.62-64). Phallic insinuations, onomatopoeic expressions, and fornication postures are explicitly and visually exposed here, witnessing the majestic state of staged agony and despair of a female who goes mad and out of control because of the patriarchal pressure put on her shoulders previously by Hamlet in the "nunnery" episode (3.1) or Laertes and Polonius warning her not to have sex with the man she loves in earlier scenes. It is worth noting that the subsequent episode of the violent death of Ophelia will take place off-stage. However, the theatrics of violence are evident in her death. Queen Gertrude, playing the role of a chorus, explains graphically, sequence by sequence, the carefully managed staged death of a disarmed Ophelia wearing a garland as a crown and then climbing a willow tree before falling into a stream and sinking. The degree of pain in madness and the performative aspect of this pain are described by Caroll Camden, who claims that: "Ophelia exhibits many of the classical symptoms of *passio hysteria* brought on by *erotoma*" (Camden, 1964, p. 254). The process she goes through before her death is very similar to onstage acting with choking, beating, singing, punning, crying, throwing tirades, walking the stage, climbing and jumping rituals that any company of actors could perform. Repressed desires, agony, betrayal and death become more than ideas or concepts; they are staged, narrated and performed in *Hamlet*.

Probably one of the play's cruellest instances of theatre occurs when the madness of Ophelia becomes a spectacle where the insane female is observed, watched, commented upon, and scrutinized first by Gertrude, then by Polonius and finally by Laertes. Ophelia's madness becomes a show, a performance, an entertainment where she plays the role of an actress while others who watch and observe her become actors/spectators. The show is monstrous and grotesque; it evokes Elizabethans attending the horrific spectacle of mad people at Bedlam Hospital in London for their amusement.[10] Even after her death, her funeral procession is a spectacle commented upon by Hamlet, who stages his beloved metaphorically. Ophelia's funeral is an example of how theatre can be used to create a sense of spectacle and heightened emotion. The funeral is described as a theatrical event, with a procession of mourners, including Queen Gertrude, Prince Hamlet and other courtiers, who are dressed in black and carrying flowers. The scene is described in detail, with specific instructions for the actors on how to move and behave; it includes a song by a group of mourning women.

The funeral of Ophelia in the play is also significant in terms of its impact on the audience. The spectacle of the funeral, with its colourful imagery, music and emotions, is

intended to evoke a strong emotional response from the audience and to heighten the tragic atmosphere of the play. Additionally, the funeral serves as a symbolic representation of Ophelia's physical and emotional death, as well as the death of innocence and purity in the play, specifically in the context of the corruption and deception of the royal court.

The theatrics of the mind: From dilemma to meta-self

Violence is not only expressed using the visual or the performative, or the graphic; its presence also follows a constructed mental process. Brutality can be seen as a manifestation of the characters' mental states. As we have seen, the titular character Hamlet is driven to acts of violence by his grief, anger and desire for revenge after his father's death and the subsequent remarriage of his mother to his uncle. Other characters, such as Laertes and Fortinbras, are also motivated by violence and grievances. Thus, in *Hamlet,* violence can be interpreted as a reflection of the characters' internal mental states and emotions rather than just physical acts. In this vein, the expression theatrics of the mind is used to talk about minds in a fury. Stephen Greenblatt qualifies this mental suffering in the play as a kind of "corrosive inwardness" (Greenblatt, 2008, p. 208). He, in this vein, considers this interior corrosion as a feature of the characters' inward-looking nature and their preoccupation with their thoughts and feelings. The theatrics of the mind correspond to the characters who experience psychological and emotional turmoil and who are consumed by their inner conflicts and grappling with deep-seated emotions like grief, anger and betrayal. This inward focus leads to a sense of alienation and detachment from the world around them, ultimately contributing to the play's themes of uncertainty and instability. In the play, Hamlet is consumed by grief, anger and a sense of existential confusion as he tries to make sense of the events around him. His inward turmoil is a manifestation of the more considerable corruption and decay that pervades the court of Denmark and the wider world. Greenblatt argues that this inwardness is both a result of and a commentary on the morally and politically corrupt world depicted in the play. Through his struggle against the values of his world and his inability to accomplish what he is supposed to do, Hamlet transforms the internal violence haunting his mind into a new aesthetic ethics. He, in a way, traverses himself and goes a step further to be in a new parallel dimension which is very different from the reality he lives in. Jean Baudrillard explains in *Simulacra and Simulation* that

> "we dream of passing through ourselves and of finding ourselves in the beyond […] After the fantasy of seeing oneself […] comes that of being

> able to circle around oneself […] traversing oneself, of passing through one's own spectral body." (Baudrillard. Tr. Glaser, 2006, p. 105)

Baudrillard focuses on creating one mental space situated "in the beyond" and located in the realm of dreams. Prince Hamlet's moral agony takes a different dimension from the ghost's, Ophelia's, or his mother's. This is how he wishes to be transformed into "dew" (Shakespeare, 1.2.129) or to find rest via suicide. At the same time, Hamlet in act 5 succeeds in reaching a new resurrection and creates a new *Baudrillardian* space. Before reaching that conclusion, it is essential to survey Hamlet's mental process. The coming analysis examines the theatrics of Hamlet's mind and the ordeals he experiences throughout the play until he reaches a new self within a space beyond. The scrutiny of the play reveals that Hamlet's dilemma goes beyond the necessity of avenging his father. Hamlet suffers initially from an inability to grasp a broader sense of justice. The different soliloquies he performs prove that he is out of place and out of space. Hamlet keeps searching for a stage where he can prove himself. He continuously expresses resistance to the whole world order, whether it is of medieval or Renaissance roots. Rather than being comfortably immersed within his world and trying to find solutions to the problems it pauses within the terms of his time, he expresses resistance and refusal towards it. Hamlet transcends the values of his age and his ancestors since he criticizes and challenges the feudal code of honour and the Renaissance Machiavellian spirit. He questions traditional notions of revenge and morality and ultimately finds himself caught between two worlds, unable to embrace either set of values fully. The words spoken by Hamlet betray his inner thoughts and emotions, which often contradict his actions and behaviour. Hamlet struggles with indecision and hesitation throughout the play, and his words often reveal this internal conflict. For example, he frequently contemplates taking revenge for his father's murder but also doubts the morality of such an act. This internal conflict is reflected in his soliloquies, where he speaks to himself and reveals his true feelings, despite trying to maintain a façade of madness in front of others. Additionally, his words often reveal his deep sense of melancholy and despair, which further betray his struggles with grief, loss and meaning. Ultimately, Hamlet's words serve as a window into his inner turmoil, exposing the depth of his psychological and emotional struggles and betraying his efforts to maintain a composed exterior. This is how the theatrics of the mind operate.

An excellent example of Hamlet's incapacity to be a Homeric medieval hero comes when the prince promises his father to take revenge with all the love he has in his heart:

"Haste me to know't, that I with wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love
May sweep to my revenge." (1.4. 29-30)

Hamlet creates a new type of hero that can be called a meta-hero who transcends the traditional notion of the Homeric hero. In ancient Greek literature, heroes were typically depicted as larger-than-life figures with exceptional physical and moral strength who embody bravery and honour. However, Hamlet challenges this archetype by presenting an introspective, conflicted hero wrestling with complex moral and existential questions. Hamlet's introspection and self-doubt set him apart from traditional Homeric heroes. He is a hero who questions authority and traditional norms and seeks to understand his place in the world and the meaning of life. His struggle with revenge, morality and death are themes that are not typically present in the tales of ancient Greek heroes but reflect the intellectual and philosophical enquiries of the meta-hero.

Pain, suffering and confusion affect Hamlet's body and mind to the extent that he wishes to build a holographic being by exorcizing his physical body and transforming it into a volatile, mercurial entity. Hamlet wishes that "this too too sullied flesh would melt,/Thaw and resolve itself into a dew" (1.2.129-130). He needs to change his physical constitution since the world he aspires to create is different. Whenever he feels that the mental process towards developing a new meta-being fails him, he expresses his ill-being and places himself as an estranged victim. He expresses frustration and despair over the circumstances that constantly work against him. He feels that every event and occasion is conspiring against him, making it difficult for him to achieve his goals and fulfil his duty. Hamlet cannot adjust his mind; he needs to create a new self. Nothing works for him; even his revenge is "dull" (4.4.32). Revenge is not fit for Hamlet because his meta-self refuses to take it. His inner struggle with morality and the ethics of vengeance shows how his mind is changing. Throughout the play, Hamlet is torn between his desire to avenge his father's death and his reservations about the morality of such an act. He is not only conflicted about the act itself but also about his motivations and the consequences that might result from taking revenge. Hamlet's meta-self can be seen as his inner moral compass, guiding him to question the wisdom and rightness of revenge. He is aware of the more significant implications of his actions and realizes that revenge is not a simple solution. This inner conflict between his desire for vengeance and his moral code leads him to delay taking action. In this way, Hamlet's "meta-self" refuses to allow him to take revenge, reflecting his struggle with the complexities of the human condition and the morality of vengeance. This inner struggle sets Hamlet apart from other revenge tragedy characters and makes him a unique and

complex hero. Hamlet does not feel he belongs to the world surrounding him. When he reflects on his despair and indecision and muses on taking action to end his troubles by opposing them directly, he acknowledges the existence of overwhelming problems and obstacles in his life. Hamlet must find a course of action, as an individual, that would put the whole world to rights and end his mental agony; probably, Hamlet needs to build a stage in his mind and cast and direct a meta-self in a meta-world practising, thus, the theatrics of his mind. In the same way, metatheatre challenges theatre's claim to be realistic. The notion of the meta-self defies human ethics; it stands against values as unified and overconfident.[11] The meta-self is a mirror, a staged traversing mind through which the sufferings and contradictions of characters show the illusory aspect of what is known or agreed on as truth and create a new space, a space beyond.

Before reaching the meta-self, a whole process based on dilemmas, contradictions and pain occurs in Hamlet's mind. Torn between what he is looking for and what he is compelled to do, his words and actions reach a state of disintegration, lose their sense, and continue to betray his real nature or possibly his real intentions. Each time, Hamlet goes through a process of self-loathing and tortured thinking. He moves from self-disgust to resolution to act. However, each move reveals more and more his ineptitude in accomplishing revenge and proving that what he will get is not his uncle's life taken but a newly created meta-self. His resolution to act does not take the direction of acting in favour of his outside world and executing cold revenge; instead, he acts mentally to create a new meta-self that transcends the codes of his age. In act 4, scene 4, he declares: "Oh from this time forth, / My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth" (Shakespeare, 1982, 4.4.66). The lack of cohesion and harmony characterizing Hamlet's words is a token of the absence of consistency. Hamlet goes through a process towards maturation via a path full of twists and shocks. It is no surprise, then, to see that his actions betray his thoughts. The weight of the process is so violent that he believes "examples gross as earth exhort [him]" (4.4.46) while he remains unmoving. This metaphor equates "examples" with "earth", which indicates the weight of the pressure on his shoulders. The process of maturation that Hamlet goes through is so disturbing that things turn upside down in his mind, and landmarks become blurred. Hamlet falls prey to contradictions to the point that ambition becomes divine to him. The phrase "divine ambition" (4.4.48) is paradoxical because ambition is often thought of as a negative or selfish quality, while divinity is associated with holiness and moral purity. The contradiction reflects the young prince's broader existential crisis. Hamlet, during this journey towards the meta-self, is full of contradictions. Even his understanding of ambition is complex and contradictory. At times, he sees ambition as a divine and noble quality, motivated by a desire for justice and revenge for his father's murder. In these moments, he understands his

ambition as a virtuous pursuit driven by a higher purpose. However, by the end of the play, he views ambition as a fleeting and unrealistic fantasy, full of false promises and empty dreams: "a fantasy and trick" and "an egg-sell" (4.4). He sees many of the other characters in the play as consumed by their ambition, leading them to betray their morals and engage in dangerous and deceptive behaviour. In these moments, Hamlet considers ambition destructive, leading people astray and tempting them to act against their better judgement.

One of the culminating moments of the mind's theatrics occurs after Hamlet's encounter with the company of players in act 2, scene 2, where he experiences a deep sense of self-loathing and crisis. Hamlet, in this soliloquy, feels overwhelmed by his indecisiveness and procrastination. He berates himself for being a "rogue" and "peasant slave" who cannot fulfil his duty as a prince and avenge his father's death. His despair and hopelessness further compound this self-loathing, as he feels he is wasting his life and betraying his own potential. This soliloquy reveals the depths of Hamlet's internal conflict and crisis as he grapples with his limitations and the pressures of his circumstances.

> "O what a rogue and peasant slave am I![…]
> A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak
> Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
> And can say nothing—no, not for a king,[…]
> Who calls me villain, breaks my pate across,
> Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face,
> Tweaks me by the nose, gives me the lie I'th' throat
> As deep as to the lungs—who does me this,
> Ha![…]." (Shakespeare, 1982, 2.2. 544, 62-64, 67-71)

Hamlet's mind becomes a stage where he seems to be split in two, with one side turning against the other, one part unrecognized and intimidating the other mercilessly and crudely. It seems that Hamlet needs to interiorize the murderous bid of the ghost to kill Claudius and turn it against himself, to rehearse it, soliloquize on it, and perform it so that he would evolve towards an ulterior state of maturity that will enable him to exorcize the ghost and create a meta-self. The moment Hamlet becomes able to concretely identify the violence of the world in which he lives, the moment he stages the violence in his mind, the moment he exorcizes the grip of the ghost over him, the moment he reconciles with himself as a theatrical being, the moment he starts to build a meta-self and the moment he acquires a broader view of justice. Baudrillard

states in this vein: “The holographic attempt literally jumps over its shadow, and plunges into transparency, to lose itself there” (Baudrillard, 2006, p. 109).

In his book *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard argues that the proliferation of images and simulations in modern society has created a world where the distinction between reality and representation has become blurred. He contends that the holographic image is the ultimate form of simulation, as it is a perfect copy of an original that no longer exists. Baudrillard argues that the hologram represents the ultimate stage of the “precession of simulacra,” a process by which images and signs come to replace reality. He asserts that the hologram symbolizes the postmodern state, in which the distinction between the actual and the simulated is dissolved, and a hyperreal, a simulation of reality, replaces the world. He adds that the hologram is a metaphor for how the media, consumer culture, and technology have created a world in which images and simulations are given more weight and credibility than the real world. He argues that in this hyperreal world, the distinction between the real and the simulated is blurred, and a simulation of reality replaces reality.

In this vein, Hamlet, while holding the *memento mori*[12] in his hand in a highly theatrical instant in a Beckettian setting amid a stinking graveyard and while commenting on Yorrick’s skull comes to the epiphanic discovery that Homeric figures like Alexander the Great and the imperial Julius Caesar were turned to dust; he becomes able to shun the outside world, get rid of the grip of the ghost over him, bury the ethics of his age and release himself from his mother and lover. Hamlet, out of violent pain and agony, in a theatrical way, plunges into transparency, as Baudrillard (2006) states and creates a meta-self. For the first time in the play, he proves himself able to claim his name: “This is I/ Hamlet the Dane” (5.1.250-251). In the following scene, Hamlet embraces his royalty and proudly employs the royal “we”. That is the unique time in the play when he speaks like a monarch. In act 5, he dramatically and scarcely refers to his father. Undoubtedly, Hamlet releases himself from the obsession with his father. His resolution to abandon the teachings of “an eye for an eye”[13] and to forget bloody, violent, murderous revenge theatrically transforms into the creation of a meta-self with a broader view of justice. Living or dying is no longer problematic to him. In the play’s final act, Prince Hamlet is a new person; there is lucidity, consistency and self-confidence in his attitude. The contrast with the previous scenes is both diametrical and theatrical. After this epiphanic scene, Hamlet is not perplexed anymore. We even forget the fragility he shows in act 4, scene 4. The play’s last scene does not require monologues, soliloquies, metatheatre or performances. Hamlet has gone beyond “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” and can share his deep and complex

reflections with his intimate friend Horatio and the world. The meta-self he has created is redemptive, and the theatrics that helped him reach this new self are no longer needed.

The above analysis has engaged in implementing a challenging method of combining different theoretical concepts not commonly used simultaneously, which helped the reflection on the idea of the meta-self. For example, the alliance between the carnivalesque and the metatheatrical has allowed the detection of the mechanism of the theatrics of the stage while dealing with violence. Theatrics of violence are not only present at the level of performance on stage, since language and images are proven theatricalized, and Hamlet's mind is staged. On a different scale, the discovery of a significant dynamic of violence constructed upon theatrics and staging and its combination with some principles by Baudrillard, notably "hyperreality",[14] "traversing the self",[15] and "holographic attempts".[16] Baudrillard's definition has allowed us to create a concept that the present research calls "the meta-self". The meta-self is a self that challenges moral and social overconfidence and mocks bombastic authoritarian viewpoints about life; it operates as a transcending mind in constant rehearsal and reassessment of the certitudes of humans.

In *Hamlet*, the young prince is often considered to have a strong sense of meta-self or self-awareness. Throughout the play, he constantly questions his actions and motivations and is acutely aware of his choices' impact on those around him. This self-reflection is demonstrated in his soliloquies, where he speaks aloud and expresses his innermost thoughts and feelings. Additionally, his feigned madness serves as a way to distance himself from his actions and observe those around him without their knowledge. Through his intense self-reflection, Hamlet ultimately comes to a deeper understanding of himself and ultimately takes action to avenge his father's murder. All in all, understanding violence in *Hamlet* is proven to follow stage-managed theatrics at the level of the language and images used, at the level of the construction of a theatre that comments on theatre characterized by the grotesque and the vulgar, and at the level of a staged mind. The use of images portraying sickness, chaos and danger heightens the play's rhythm and tempo. These images determine the theatrical pace of the play and cast on it a gothic touch of gloominess. The presence of carnivalesque scenes, such as the scene of Ophelia's madness and the gravediggers' scene, corroborates the permeation of violence. At the same time, these intermediate scenes heighten the theatrical and show the perspective from which William Shakespeare problematizes the question of violence. The theatrics of images, sound, stage and mind are necessary steps for Hamlet to create a meta-self.

Metatheatre and the grotesque are deeply connected to the issue of violence in *Hamlet*; their connection causes the creation of a meta-self. Even Ophelia's suicide could be read as an

attempt on her part to create a new meta-self. It could be read as an act of empowerment or emancipation, as she takes control of her own life and death in a society where women were largely powerless and controlled by men. Equally, Ophelia's death is problematized by Shakespeare thanks to the rich layers of images and the theatrical dimension of the different stages of her fall, starting from her bawdy songs to her wandering in the castle, to her exchanges with Gertrude, to the scenes where she is observed and spied on, to her spectacular drowning, and finally to her very theatrical and carnivalesque burial.

Endnotes:

[1] All references to *Hamlet* in the present article are from William Shakespeare. *Hamlet.* (London: Routledge, 1982). Print.

[2] The theatricalization of violence refers to how violence is presented on stage in a stylized or heightened manner. In *Hamlet*, the violence is often depicted in a stylized way, such as the play-within-a-play, which Hamlet uses to confirm his uncle's guilt in the murder of his father. This scene is a representation of the murder, but it's not an actual murder but a representation of one.

[3] Michael Hattaway details in her article "The 'Closet' Scene in *Hamlet*: Freud, Localisation, Screen Versions, and Essentialist Characterisation" the Freudian sexual image of the closet scene via a minute display of the stage and screen history of the play enumerating props like candle sticks, beds, pink satin sheets etc. (Hattaway, 2012, pp. 71-85)

[4] "Treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain" (2.2.581).

[5] "satyr" (1.2.140).

[6] For a detailed definition of *happening*, see Lisa. S. Wainwright. "Happening". *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/art/Happening> [Accessed 17 July 2020].

[7] Hamlet puns on a well-known historical event, "the Diet of Worms", 1521. For further details, see Heiko Oberman. *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2006.

[8] A meta-murder in the sense that it is theatricalized and performed on stage.

[9] *Mise en abyme* is a technique in theatre and other forms of storytelling in which a story within a story is told. The term is derived from the French phrase "mise en abyme", which means "placement into the abyss". In theatre, it is often used to create a sense of self-referentiality, where the play or performance comments on itself and its own artifice. This can be achieved through metatheatre, where characters within the play comment on or acknowledge that they are characters in a play or through the use of a play within a play.

[10] Several articles and books developed the notion of madness as a spectacle in the Renaissance period with references to Bedlam Hospital. For more details about this idea, see Natsu Hattori. 1995. "'The pleasure of your Bedlam': The theatre of madness in the Renaissance". *History of Psychiatry*. 6, 23, 1995, (283-308).

[11] Notions of selves, meta-selves, theatrical selves, performative selves and identity have been discussed by Zied Ben Amor in his article "From Illness to Meta-selves in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *King Lear*: New Identities in the Time of Disease".

[12] Memento mori is a Latin phrase that translates to "remember that you have to die". It is a reminder to live in the present and to make the most of one's time, as death is inevitable. The phrase is often associated with medieval art and literature, where it was a common theme to reflect on the transience of life and the inevitability of death. *Memento mori* has been used in various forms throughout history, including in art, literature and philosophy. In art, it is often depicted through symbols such as skulls, hourglasses and wilting flowers. In literature, it is used as a theme to encourage the reader to live in the present and to make the most of their time. In philosophy, it is used as a reminder to be mindful of one's mortality and to live a virtuous life. It is also often associated with the Christian tradition, where it is used as a reminder of the importance of repentance and salvation and the purpose of the reminder to live a virtuous life and be ready for judgment day.

[13] Hamlet is determined to abandon the concept of *lex talionis*, the principle of retaliation or retributive justice, which imposes a penalty on a person proportional to the injury they have caused

[14] Hyperreality is a term coined by Jean Baudrillard to describe the state in which a simulation or representation of reality replaces reality. He argues that in contemporary society, the distinction between reality and representation has become blurred and that people are increasingly living in a state of hyperreality, where the difference between the two is no longer clear. It is a product of the power of technology and the media to create

simulations that are indistinguishable from reality which can be found in different forms, such as in advertising, entertainment, politics, and so on.

[15] Traversing the self is a concept that is closely related to Jean Baudrillard's ideas about hyperreality and simulation. It refers to the process of navigating the multiple representations and simulations of the self that exist in contemporary society, which is fragmented and dispersed across various forms of media and representation. The idea of traversing the self is closely related to the dissolution of the subject and the loss of the traditional sense of self in contemporary society. Therefore, the process of traversing the self involves navigating this multiplicity of identities and representations, trying to find coherence and continuity in the face of the constant flux and change of the hyperreal world.

[16] Jean Baudrillard's ideas about holography refer to his belief that contemporary society is increasingly characterized by a kind of "holographic" logic, in which images, representations, and simulations replace reality, and the distinction between the real and the fake becomes blurred. He argues that the world is becoming more and more like a hologram, where the whole is contained within each part, and each part contains the whole, and that it's closely related to the idea of hyperreality, which he defines as the state in which a simulation or representation of reality replaces reality. Baudrillard claims that in a hyperreal world, the distinction between the real and the simulated is no longer clear and that people are increasingly living in a world of simulations and representations that are indistinguishable from reality.

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