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An analysis of Shakespere's Hamlet through Goffman's theories

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Introduction

What I would like to illustrate is an approach to great classics of literature, which involves theories, that might seem at first impression quite distant from the world of literature. I want to show a different approach to Shakespearean drama and at the same time how theories developed to describe our society may also be applicable to the world of drama.I decided to analyze the work of William Shakespeare's Hamlet in a sociological key using one of the most famous theories of the Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman, the theory related to social action, explained in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. I will, therefore, take into consideration these two works.

Written between 1600 and 1602 and then first published in 1603, *Hamlet* is still considered one of the most important works of William Shakespeare. The Danish prince has become over time one of the most iconic and represented characters.

The depth of the character combined with the facets of his nature have made him the object of numerous essays, without however dissipating its charm and mystery. In *The presentation of self in everyday life,* published for the first time in 1959, Goffman describes the dynamics of social interaction through the metaphor of theatrical representations. In the preface of his work the sociologist describes the theories he will analyze as a reference scheme that can be used in the analysis of any social system.

Goffman offers a manual on how the interactions between individuals work within society. His work draws on his experience in the Shetland Islands and the observations made during his time there, which he used as the basis for his doctoral thesis. To these he added the theory of the sociologist Emile Durkheim, who in his turn observed how society consisted of the set of social facts that existed between individuals. With the term "social facts" Durkheim meant the set of ways of acting and relating external to the individual which are imposed on him.

In *The Presentation Of Self in Everyday Life,* Goffman placed the core of his thinking arguing that each individual adopts a particular self-image which the people who interact with them must accept and believe true.It is on this tacit agreement that the totality of our relationships is founded; this is what keeps society together and functioning.

This tacit and mutual collaboration between the parties also causes an individual to choose not to be anything other than what appears to others. Representation consists of a fixed part called the facade,which defines the situation to the public. The two main places in which Goffman divides the space in which the representation takes place are the background and the front. With the term frontspace Goffman means «that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance»[1]. This can be seen as that part of the stage in which the actor performs. In opposition to this, there is the other main area, which Goffman calls backstage, an area where the actor is alone and where he «can relax,he can drop his front, forgo speaking in his lines, and step out of character."[2] This is an intimate space that constitutes a private area for the actor, a space in which he can feel free to be himself and in which he prepares his representation, in other words a space in which he constructs the mask with which he will go on stage. The sociologist provides us several examples of backstage situations, in my opinion the most clarifying is the one about television:

Another interesting example of backstage difficulties is found in radio and television broadcasting work. In these situations, back region tends to be defined' as all places where the camera is not focussed at the moment or all places out of range of ' l i v e ' microphones. Thus an announcer may hold the sponsor's product up at arm's length in front of the camera while he holds his nose with his other hand, his face being out of the picture, as a way of joking with his teammates. Professionals, of course, tell many exemplary tales 72 of how persons who though they were backstage were in fact on the air and how this backstage conduct discredited the definition of the situation being maintained on the air. For technical reasons, then, the walls that broadcasters have to hide behind can be very treacherous, tending to

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1   Erving Goffman "The presentation of self in everyday life" pag. 13 (1959)
2   Erving Goffman "The presentation of self in everyday life" pag. 70 (1959)

fall at the flick of a switch or a turn ot the camera. Broadcasting artists must live with this staging contingency[3]

Goffman also presents the concept of Equipe,a support group to the main actor who helps and supports him in the representation. In Goffman's words, we can describe this group of actors as «any set of individuals who co-operate in staging a single routine[4]». It is therefore implied that they are aware of the collective ultimate goal of what they are working on.

Within his work, the sociologist proposes numerous examples of teams and representations. Among them the most clarifying one is that of a group of waiters who work in a restaurant in a hotel in the Shetland Islands.Front area and backstage in this example take the form of two areas of the restaurant: the room, where the waiters come into contact with the customers, and the hotel kitchen, where the waiters away from the customers' eyes behaved differently. The courteous and helpful attitude shown in the dining room gives way to rude expressions and brisk and brazen ways. Moreover, in the kitchen, the waiters also used to disrespect customers and tell each other anecdotes and secrets about them.

Goffman describes this episode by writing « As he passes the door a sudden change comes over him. The set of his shoulders alters; all the dirt and hurry and irritation have dropped off in an instant. He glides over the carpec, with a solemn priest-like air.»[5]   For the construction not to collapse and the representation to go on, it is therefore necessary that the two areas remain separate.

Throughout his work, the metaphor used by Goffman to explain his theories is that of theatrical representation. The acting subject is compared to an actor, and society to a gigantic stage on which it moves and interacts. Therefore everyone passes, according to the situations and dynamics, from covering the role of actor to covering that of the public.There is a tacit agreement not to reveal the masks of others that prevents the disintegration of society itself.It is very important for the actor to be able to always keep the impressions and reactions of others under control and use

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3   Erving Goffman "The presentation of self in everyday life" pag. 72 (1959)
4   Erving Goffman "The presentation of self in everyday life" pag. 48 (1959)
5   Erving Goffman "The presentation of self in everyday life" Pag. 73 (1959)

them to strengthen his representation, so as to avoid contradictions that could affect the success of the representation.

Expanding the Goffmanian model to the whole of society, we can see how this mechanism is applicable to all our interactions. We can use this metaphor for every aspect of our lives and establish that depending on the people we interact with we use different masks. Goffman goes deeper by entrusting the entire social fabric to the success of staging. As Phil Manning writes «successful performances usually are staged not by individuals but by teams, who share both risks and discreditable information in a manner comparable to that of a secret society. Teams perform in "front regions" -spaces from which they are observable by their different publics. They rehearse in, relax in, and retreat to "back regions," areas where front-region performances are "knowingly contradicted as a matter of course »[6].

Another key concept in Goffman is the theory of Frames. This term describes the grid in which social phenomena are contained and serve the individual to organize his own representations.

It is based on the completely arbitrary and personal way in which each individual inserted in a social context interprets the reality that surrounds him and relates to it.
In developing this analysis Erving Goffman also relies on the metaphor of theatrical performances, when an individual enters a relationship with others that are in fact representing themselves in the eyes of an audience.
According to Goffman, Framing is the process by which the actor attributes completely personal meanings to the reality that surrounds him and on the basis of these meanings he relates to it. We can therefore define framing as the way in which each individual receives, within his behavior, the different inputs that the environment that surrounds him send to him.

Starting from this Goffman also affirms that the reality in which we move cannot be considered unique but is instead the result of the union of different frames, as many as there are actors who interact with each other.

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6   Phil Manning : The Significance of Goffman's Changing Use of the Theatrical Metaphor (1959, pg 108). Appeared on Sociological Theory vol. 9 (1991)

Goffman's model can be potentially applied to any kind of society and collective environments. But there are still some exceptions that it is important to consider. Many scholars claimed that are limits of this model. One of these is the late philosoper Bruce Wilshire:

I will maintain that Goffman construes appearances as if they were phantasmic things which exist here and now and contained in themselves. Hence he cannot properly distinguish the appearance of an actor's performance in the isolated and ideal time of the play's "world" from the appearance of our lives offstage which refer beyond the here and now into the future of world-time-the time which holds us as persons and artists in its grip. Hence he cannot properly distinguish between the fictional life of characters in plays from the actual life of persons in society. Persons, for Goffman, mask a basic (perhaps unknowable) asociality behind a phantasmic sociality. Goffman has a keen eye for discovering similarities between onstage and offstage life and his work is well worth studying. But planted at the bottom of his theory of the self is an idea of appearance that stunts and distorts the theory.[7]

I will try to use Goffman's theory to analize a fictional society, Elsinore's castle in Hamlet, treating it as a living and real place in which each member of the court performs a certain function following a specific ceremonials acting in ways and attitudes perfected over time, and staging always perfectly actions credible in front of their audience just as it happens in real societies. I chose to analyze William Shakespeare's Hamlet from this perspective because in my opinion the protagonist has some traits of behavior that bring him very close to the type of social subject envisioned by Goffman in his model.

Hamlet's character moves within his court, always paying close attention to the way in which he addresses each other character he meets, changing his way of speaking from time to time and always choosing carefully the type of words and the discursive style.

At the same time we can notice how Hamlet's changes throughout the succession of the drama,as he finds out the pieces of the puzzle he is trying to put together. Furthermore, he is forced to move into an hostile context, having no allies and being unable to reveal to anyone that he knows the terrible secret of his uncle.

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7   Bruce Wilshire: "The Dramaturgical model of Behavior : Its strenghts and weaknesses" Symbolic Interaction , Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall 1982)

This marks a first point of separation between Goffman's theory and my line of analysis. Analizing Hamlet through Goffman's eyes, we can see that in the play lacks the element of the Equipe, which helps the actor in his staging, even if at a certain point Hamlet will be able to recreate somekind of surrogates through his inventiveness. However, we can find a new connection with Goffman's ideology in the way the protagonist constructs and mentally prepares himself for each encounter with the other characters.

Also in Hamlet there are areas in which the protagonist practices and fine-tunes his techniques, perfecting the "mask" he will wear on stage: these areas can be seeing as the back areas in Goffman's model. Trying to draw a parallel with Shakespeare's work, the role of the front is covered by the dialogues and interactions that Hamlet has with the other characters where Hamlet interact with the other characters and has to fake his real feelings and intentions, while the background is formed by Hamlet's monologues and soliloquies,the moments in which the prince reflects for himself, perfects his plan to try to unmask his uncle Claudius and make up his ideas about the way to act.

To analyze these two dimensions in Shakespeare's text, we must analyze the style used by Shakespeare in his writing and, in particular,how the scenes are recited.In the following chapters I will analyze the "masks" that the character of Hamlet builds through the unfolding of the story.

At the end, I will also propose an analysis of another important character of Shakespeare's work only apparently of a minor standing, Ophelia. The character of Ophelia stands out considerably from all the other characters that appear in the work. It can in fact be indicated as the only one to be "pure" and honest, loyal to everyone and "transparent". She wears no masks other than her real face and is always moved by sincere motivations.

Using the same metaphor with which Shakespeare describes Guildenstern «Why, look at you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass; and there

is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ , yet cannot you make it speak. 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to play than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, thought you can fret me, yet you cannot play upon me.» (Act 3, scene 2, verses 355-364).[8] Ophelia does not play but is instead played.By her father and her brother first, by Gertrude then and finally also by Hamlet.Ophelia's fault is that of being too naive and loyal; loyal to her family, to her king and queen and too attached to the ideal of courteous love.

Ophelia is stuck between these two opposite poles, being loyal to her father and accept the court of Hamlet. Polonius is worried about the purity of her daughter. In his view, Hamlet cannot be the right partner for Ophelia; he will use her and then leave her, forever stealing her purity. The key moment in which we can outline Ophelia's decision is when she lies to Hamlet saying that Polonius is not there, when instead he is hiding behind the curtains to eavesdrop. At that point we can understand who Ophelia has chosen to be faithful to.

We can define Ophelia as a female character of the Renaissance mold: hers is in fact a kind love, guided by what could be defined as the trinity of a typical Renaissance women: God, country and family. The love Ophelia feels for Hamlet will always come after the love Ophelia feels for her family and rulers. In the end Ophelia goes mad and takes her own life. Her death is seen as a sinful action: only thanks to the will of the queen can the body of Ophelia be buried in the holy ground side of the cemetery.

By reading the text we can find out some points that make us understand Shakespeare's point of view on women and that have contributed to fuel the suspicions about the English poet's misogyny.
Ophelia is the only character who clearly experiences madness According to Elaine Showalter «for the Elizabethans, Hamlet was the prototype of melancholy male madness, associated with intellectual and imaginative genius; but Ophelia's affliction was erotomania, or love-madness. Biological and emotional in origins, it was caused by her unrequited ove and repressed sexual desire»[9].

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8   William Shakespeare : Hamlet 1601 (Ed.Collins Classics 2012)
9   Elaine Showalter : Ophelia, gender and madness (2016)

Shakespeare' Style in *Hamlet* : words as masks.

In the preface to his work, Goffman places considerable importance on the theme of the mask, a central element for a positive success of the representation. He use the words of Geore Santayana to establish this concept

Masks are arrested expressions and admirable echoes of feeling, at once faithful, discreet, and superlative. Living things in contact with the air must acquire a cuticle, and it is not urged against cuticles that they are not hearts; yet some philosophers seem to be angry with images for not being things, and with words for not being feelings. Words and images are like shells, no less integral parts of nature than are the substances they cover, but better addressed to the eye and more open to observation. I would not say thatsubstance exists for the sake of appearance, or faces for the sake of masks, or the passions for the sake of poetry and virtue. Nothing arises in nature for the sake of anything e lse ; all these phases and products are involved equally in the round of existence.[10]

Now, wanting to use the character of Hamlet as a direct example, we can observe how the young prince tries to hide his real intentions behind a particular choice of words.Hamlet's character, often varies his way of speaking in the work depending on whether he is alone or is in dialogue with others.This happens because Hamlet tries to look crazy in the eyes of other people: this is the mask with which he choses to "go on stage". It is is also important to underline that during the play not all the times in which Hamlet thinks he is alone, he is really alone. In fact, he is often spied by Polonius, the King and other characters hidden behind curtains and walls. According to Mufeed-Al-Abdullah and Susanne Shunnaq,Hamlet constantly finds himself in between Claudius and the Ghost :

the linguistic dominance of the two different registers of the two brothers puts Hamlet in a puzzling situation being approached by both. In his attempt not to jeopardize his security, probably his life, in this combat between the two brothers, Hamlet resorts to different types of language during the action of the play

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10 George Santayana: Soliloquies in England and Later Soliloquies (New York: Scribners, 1922), pp. 131-132.

congruous to the various stages of his evolution and relevant to what level of awareness he has vis-à-vis the events gradually unfolding before him.[11]

Following the line of interpretation of the aforementioned authors, we can identify three key characters who rise above the others in importance: Hamlet, King Claudius and Hamlet's deceased father, who appears in the form of a ghost. The two authors link each of these three characters to a specific spiritual dimension taking their cue from the beliefs of the Elizabethan era in which the story takes place. So, according to their analysis, King Claudius represents the «Language of Terrestrial Sovereignty»[12], while The Ghost and Hamlet respectively a «Chtonian Language»[13] and a «Courtly»[14] one the latter. The interventions of both characters are rich in religious and biblical references and quotations: the confusion felt by the young prince about the real nature of the Ghost is heightened and is of increasing difficulty of understanding.

Hamlet's speeches are of a deliberately difficult nature to interpret. This choice, in my opinion, has the function of placing the protagonist on a much higher cultural level than that of the other characters in the drama and it is also used by Hamlet himself as evidence to convince the others of his madness, be it real or just simulated. Goffman defines this concept by writing that «sometimes the traditions of an individual's role will lead him to give a well-designed impression of a particular kind and yet he may be neither consciously nor unconsciously disposed to create such an impression.»[15]

Some examples can be seen in the dialogue between Hamlet and Polonius and the one between Hamlet and Rosencratz :

HAMLET Words, words, words.
LORD POLONIUS What is the matter, my lord?
HAMLET Between who?
LORD POLONIUS I mean, the matter that you read, my lord.
HAMLET Slanders, sir: for the satirical rogue says here that old men have grey

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11 Mufeed Al-Abdullah, Susanne Ramadan :Shakespeare's Language Strategies in Hamlet (Journal of Literature and Art Studies, ISSN 2159-5836 October 2012, Vol. 2, No. 10, 911-924)

12 Ibidem

13 Ibidem

14 Ibidem

15 Erving Goffman : The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life pag. 3 (1959)

beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plum-tree gum and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams: all which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down, for yourself, sir, should be old as I am, if like a crab you could go backward.
LORD POLONIUS (Aside) Though this be madness, yet there is method in 't. Will you walk out of the air, my lord? [16] (Act 2, scene 2, 196-212)

Polonius is commissioned by the king and queen to investigate Hamlet's mental health and then report to them what he has discovered.According to Mufeed Al-Abdullah and Susanne Ramadan «what Hamlet does in this and similar examples is to deprive language of one of its major methods of signification, its context. This way he leads to the confusion of his listeners.»[17] The dialectic used by Hamlet in the dialogue with Polonius allows the prince not only to deflect Claudius' suspicions but also to make fun of Polonius himself and make him think that his mental state is caused by the impossible love between him and Ophelia. Moreover, he accuses Polonius to be a fishmonger and openly act as if he were crazy. Hamlet wants to make Polonius believe that he has gone crazy but Polonius misinterpret the words of the prince and attributes to his madness a wrong reason.

Another instance is the dialogue between Hamlet and Rosencrantz in Act 4 Scene 2:

HAMLET Do not believe it.
ROSENCRANTZ Believe what?
HAMLET That I can keep your counsel and not mine own. Besides, to be demanded of a sponge! what replication should be made by the son of a king?
ROSENCRANTZ Take you me for a sponge, my lord?
HAMLET Ay, sir, that soaks up the king's countenance, his rewards, his authorities. But such officers do the king best service in the end: he keeps them, like an ape, in the corner of his jaw; first mouthed, to be last swallowed: when he needs what you have gleaned, it is but squeezing you, and, sponge, you shall be dry again.
ROSENCRANTZ I understand you not, my lord.
HAMLET I am glad of it: a knavish speech sleeps in a foolish ear.
ROSENCRANTZ My lord, you must tell us where the body is, and go with us to the king.
HAMLET The body is with the king, but the king is not with the body. The king is a thing--

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16 William Shakespeare : Hamlet 1601
17 Mufeed Al-Abdullah, Susanne Ramadan :Shakespeare's Language Strategies in Hamlet (Journal of Literature and Art Studies, ISSN 2159-5836 October 2012, Vol. 2, No. 10, 911-924)

GUILDENSTERN A thing, my lord!
HAMLET Of nothing: bring me to him. Hide fox, and all after.[18]
(Act 4, scene 2, verses 11-30)

At this point Hamlet has already accidentaly murdered Polonius, and Rosencratz is trying to understand where the body lies. Hamlet uses his oratorical superiority to prevail over his interlocutor and make fun of him. He attributes to Rosencrantz the role of the King's sponges and of a obtuse subject, without Rosencratz realizing it.These are, among others, some vivid examples of the complexity of Hamlet's character.

Continuing with the interpretation of the work from a Goffmanian point of view, we can assume that what the character of Hamlet implements from time to time is a careful design of the scene. Goffman thus explains this process put into practice by the social actor: «When we allow that the individual projects a definition of the situation when he appears before others, we must also see chat the others, however passive their role may seem to be, will themselves effectively project a definition of the situation by virtue of their response to the individual and by virtue of any lines of action they initiate to him.»[19]

As the drama continues, Hamlet's madness changes and evolves becoming, from being only a pose, something true and a real disease. Hamlet finds himself trapped behind the mask he has built and is longer able to part wfrom it, even after he has managed to unmask Claudius and discover the truth about his father homicide. He is unable to get out of his character and the madness he has, up until that point, only simulate appears to the reader as real, suggesting a fusion between the real face and the mask.

According to James Taaffe, Hamlet «is involved in his ideal world to such an extent that even when through the use of the playlet in Act III he does discover "truth" he continues to play-act. Such play-acting reveals the ease with which he makes choices within his imaginary world and serves to contrast the reluctance he has in making choices as regards the world of Elsinore.»[20]

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18 William Shakespeare : Hamlet 1601
19 Erving Goffman : The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (pag. 3) (1959)
20 James Taaffe: Play-acting in Shakespeare's Hamlet (featured in The Imagery in "Hamlet": Acting by Jacqueline E. M. Latham)

Acting is a feature that does not comply with the character of Hamlet only. Even Claudius needs to hide himself behind a figurative mask. He has to mantain secret his past and what he has done to obtain the throne. However there are differences between their two attitudes.
Jacqueline E.M. Lathan thus wrote about this aspect:

Claudius'mask serves to root him firmly in the world of practical designs and decisions; he is not what he seems only because his will is working on two levels: being and seeming. For Hamlet, it is quite different; in so far as he adopts a mask it is so that his will -the faculty of choice based upon reason- should work on no level at all. He must escape from responsible action.[21]

The two examples proposed in this chapter show episodes in which Hamlet becomes an actor and stages his character, in what Goffman defined as the front stage area. Different is the example of Act 3 scene 2 (380-388) in which Hamlet, now alone, imagines the kind of attitude he will have to hold once only with his mother, and carefully measures the words to be used. The latter is an example of what happens backstage, where the actor exercises and mentally builds the mask that he will later bring to the stage.
To conclude this analysis of the character of Hamlet, I think it is useful to return to a view of the drama in which the castle of Elsinore takes on the contours of a micro-society where the actors move and interact each other following specific rituals of behavior. In this way, distinct roles are created and the characters are recognized characteristics that remain constant throughout the whole representation. I would now like to implement this analysis with the help of another excerpt from the work of Goffman. The sociologist wrote :

When an individual or performer plays the same part to the same audience on different occasions, -a social relationship is likely to arise . Defining social role as the enactment of rights and duties attached to a given status , 'We can say that a social role will involve one or more parts and that each of these different parts may be presented by the performer on a series of occasions to the same kinds of audience or to an audience of the same persons.[22]

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21 Jacqueline E. M. Latham: The Imagery in "Hamlet": Acting (Educational Theatre Journal , Oct., 1962, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Oct., 1962), pp. 197-202 Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press)
22 Erving Goffman : The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (pag. 9) (1959)

In the previous chapter I proposed the idea that the character of Hamlet was somehow devoid of his own representation team, but that thanks to his intellect he somehow manages to recreate one, for example with the help of the theater company, with which he unmasks Claudius. Even Hamlet himself can be placed inside a team, the Ghost team. Hamlet is in fact used as a material "arm" by his father's ghost to obtain revenge and faithfully follows the plan that the spectre proposes to him.

Hamlet firstly meet the ghost in Act 1 Scene 5, when the ghost reveales his identity and assigns the task to his son.

Ghost My hour is almost come, When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames Must render up myself.
HAMLET Alas, poor ghost!
Ghost Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing To what I shall unfold.
HAMLET Speak; I am bound to hear.
Ghost So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear.
HAMLET What?
Ghost I am thy father's spirit, Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night, And for the day confined to fast in fires, Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature Are burnt and purged away. But that I am forbid To tell the secrets of my prison-house, I could a tale unfold whose lightest word Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood, Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,
HAMLET Thy knotted and combined locks to part And each particular hair to stand on end, Like quills upon the fretful porpentine: But this eternal blazon must not be To ears of flesh and blood. List, list, O, list! If thou didst ever thy dear father love
HAMLET O God!
Ghost Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.
HAMLET Murder!
Ghost Murder most foul, as in the best it is; But this most foul, strange and unnatural.
HAMLET Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift As meditation or the thoughts of love, May sweep to my revenge. [23] (Act 1 scene 5, verses 5-30)

Then, the ghost appears one more time in Act 3 scene 4, right before the meeting between Hamlet and his mother; only Hamlet can see him. Seeing his son talking to no one serves as yet another proof of his growing insanity:

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23 William Shakespeare : Hamlet (Act 1 scene 5 5-30) 1601

HAMLET A king of shreds and patches,

Enter Ghost Save me, and hover o'er me with your wings, You heavenly guards! What would your gracious figure?

QUEEN GERTRUDE Alas, he's mad!

HAMLET Do you not come your tardy son to chide, That, lapsed in time and passion, lets go by The important acting of your dread command? O, say!

Ghost Do not forget: this visitation Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose. But, look, amazement on thy mother sits: O, step between her and her fighting soul: Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works: Speak to her, Hamlet.

HAMLET How is it with you, lady?

QUEEN GERTRUDE That you do bend your eye on vacancy And with the incorporal air do hold discourse? Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep; And, as the sleeping soldiers in the alarm, Your bedded hair, like life in excrements, Starts up, and stands on end. O gentle son, Upon the heat and flame of thy distemper Sprinkle cool patience. Whereon do you look?

HAMLET On him, on him! Look you, how pale he glares! His form and cause conjoin'd, preaching to stones, Would make them capable. Do not look upon me; Lest with this piteous action you convert My stern effects: then what I have to do Will want true colour; tears perchance for blood.

QUEEN GERTRUDE To whom do you speak this?

HAMLET Do you see nothing there?

QUEEN GERTRUDE Nothing at all; yet all that is I see. [24]

(Act 3-scene 4 verses 102-138)

Hamlet's hesitation in accepting the assignment proposed to him by his father is linked to the fact that the prince does not know the real nature of the spirit and does not know if this is good or not. Once decided, however, he decides to carry out the will of his father. It is relatively easy for the ghost to convince Hamlet because in the heart of the young prince there had already lurked the terrible suspicion that his uncle was guilty of his father's death. From this point on, there begins the process of identifying with a new character whose mask he will have to wear. Goffman thus explains this identification :

When an actor takes on an established social role, usually he finds that a particular front has already been established for it. Whether his acquisition of the role was primarily motivated by a desire to perform the given task or by a desire to maintain the corresponding front, the actor will find that he must do both. Further, if the individual takes on a task that is not only new to him but also unestablished in the society .-or if he attempts to change the light in which his task is viewed, he is likelv to find that there are already several well-established fronts among which he must choose. [25]

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24 William Shakespeare: Hamlet (Act 3-scene 4 (102-138) 1601

25 Erving Goffman : The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (pag 17) (1959)

The character of Ophelia

Throughout his career, the sociologist Erving Goffman did not deal with social interaction only. In the first part of his career he dedicated his research to social institutions, with a specific interest in psychiatric hospitals and the treatment of patients cared for in them. The result of his studies can be seen in his book *Asylums: Essays on the Condition of the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Others Inmates*, published in 1961. Goffman identifies several examples of total institutions in our society. He mainly focuses on psychiatric institutes: «In total institutions there is a basic split between a large managed group, conveniently called inmates, and a small supervisory staff. Inmates typically live in the institution and have restricted contact with the world outside the walls. The staff often operates on an eight-hour day and is socially integrated into the outside world.»[26]

In *Stigma* , published in 1963, Goffman begins to study the identity in society,focusing on those subjects who have characteristics such as to make them, in a certain sense, alien to society itself, as in the case of psychiatric patients. A Stigma is « an attribute, behavior, or reputation which is socially discrediting in a particular way»[27]: precisely because of these characteristics the subject in question finds himself excluded from the dynamics of interaction with other subjects ending up being an outcast. In *Asylum* first and then in *Stigma*, in a more detailed way, Goffman explains the term *deviance,* and consequentially Stigma in our society:

While the stranger is present before us, evidence can arise of his possessing an attribute that makes him different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind – in the extreme, a person who is quite thoroughly bad, or dangerous, or weak. He is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. Such an attribute is a stigma, especially when its discrediting effect is very extensive; sometimes it is also called a

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26 Erving Goffman : *Asylums: Essays on the Condition of the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Others Inmates(1961)*

27 Erving Goffman : Stigma (1963)

failing, a shortcoming, a handicap.[28]

Goffman analyzes three main types of Stigma that influence people's public opinion towards individuals who partially or significantly distance themselves from the majority of society:

Three grossly different types of stigma may be mentioned. First there are abominations of the body - the various physical deformities. Next there are blemishes of individual character perceived as weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty, these being inferred from a known record of, for example, mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicidal attempts, and radical political behaviour. Finally there are the tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion, these being stigma that can be transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members of a family.[29]

Stigma is not a concept introduced by Goffman, it was studied and explained earlier by other important sociologists: The first one who focused on it was Emile Durkheim in 1895 : «Imagine a society of saints, a perfect cloister of exemplary individuals. Crimes or deviance, properly so-called, will there be unknown; but faults, which appear venial to the layman, will there create the same scandal that the ordinary offense does in ordinary consciousnesses. If then, this society has the power to judge and punish, it will define these acts as criminal (or deviant) and will treat them as such». [30]

A different perspective was the one presented by another sociologist,Gerhard Falk, who starting from the idea of Goffman offers another key of lecture stating that a deviant is a subject « who deviate from the expectations of a group»[31]. He also categorized deviance dividing it in two different types, according to him two different kinds of deviance exist: societal deviance and situational deviance. Societal deviance is connected to an inner condition of the subject: «Homosexuality is, therefore, an example of societal deviance because there is such a high degree of consensus to the effect that homosexuality is different, and a violation of norms or

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28 Erving Goffman: Stigma : Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity (Pag. 12) (1963)
29 Ibidem
30 Emile Durkheim: The Rules Of Sociological Method (1895)
31 Gerhard Falk : Stigma. How we treat outsiders (2001) Prometheus Books.

social expectation»[32]. A situational deviance is a concept that varies according to a specific situation in which the subject under examination finds himself in: «A robber or other street criminal is an excellent example. It is the crime which leads to the stigma and stigmatization of the person so affected».[33]

Erving Goffman belongs to the group of sociologists that is included in what is referred to as the second school of Chicago. Alongside him is also included Robert K. Merton, who with his studies expanded and clarified the term deviance. In particular, we owe to him the implementation of sociology with the criminological sciences and the so-called Strain Theory. An important element in this theory is represented by anomie, the disappearance of norms and values that used to regulate life in a certain society, it is « an acute disjunction between the cultural norms and goals and the socially structured capacities of members of the group to act in accord with them».[34] This discrepancy between what is required of a subject and the means that are given to him to achieve that goal can cause the onset of criminal behavior and sometimes even lead to suicide.

Starting from these considerations in this chapter I will analyze the character of Ophelia. I will focus on how she differs from the others and more specifically from Hamlet, comparing and uniting the two in the aspect that distinguishes them, the madness that they reveal within the drama. These two characters, following my line of analysis, fall precisely in the category proposed by Merton of subjects who conspicuously distanced themselves from their society and unable to achieve their goals deviate from their social path to embrace criminal behavior, Hamlet, or self-destructive, Ophelia.

The main characteristics of Ophelia that emerge are her kindness and good heart, as well as purity. This causes his character to differ greatly from all the others present in the drama. While every other character is intent on carrying out his own ends and orchestrating his own plan, Ophelia is instead at the mercy of the events that happen around her and totally subservient to the

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32 Ibidem
33 Ibidem
34 Robert K. Merton : Social Theory and Social Structures , 162 (1949)

decisions that others make for her.

Ophelia would like to be able to live freely her love for Hamlet. Yet she is hindered not only by the unsteady behavior of the same, but also by her family, Polonius and Laertes, and by the two rulers, Claudius and Gertrude.Ophelia is also strongly conditioned by her being a woman within a society in which the role of women is strongly subject to the will of man. Under this respect, Ophelia also differs from the only other female character in the work, Gertrude. The queen is moved not by sincere love but by her ambition to preserve her status. Shakespeare outlines with Ophelia a weak and submissive character, devoid of willpower. First Laertes and then Polonious decide that her love for Hamlet will not be successful and that the prince does not have true love for her, faithful to her role as daughter and sister Ophelia believes in it and agrees to betray Hamlet and support her family's plan.

The moment in which Ophelia's choice appears clear to us is in scene I of Act III:

OPHELIA Good my lord, How does your honour for this many a day?
HAMLET I humbly thank you; well, well, well.
OPHELIA My lord, I have remembrances of yours, That I have longed long to re-deliver; I pray you, now receive them.
HAMLET No, not I; I never gave you aught.
OPHELIA My honour'd lord, you know right well you did; And, with them, words of so sweet breath composed As made the things more rich: their perfume lost, Take these again; for to the noble mind Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind. There, my lord.[35]
(Act3, scene 1, verses 90-102)

In the "Nunnery Scene", Hamlet has just finished reciting his monologue and notices the young Ophelia who is reading. Thinking it was a prayer book, he told her to pray for him, Ophelia replies that she intends to return all her gifts, Hamlet denies having ever given gifts and then having loved her. He concludes by advising the young woman to go to a nunnery.

The sentence implies the veiled accusation made by Hamlet against Ophelia with which the prince wants to emphasize the fact that Ophelia has somehow "prostituted" herself. In this Ophelia and Gertrude are,at least according to Hamlet, equated and accused of

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35 William Shakespeare : Hamlet 1601

the same guilt.

In terms of dialectical skills and the construction of a social mask, Ophelia is considerably inferior to Hamlet. Hers is not a pre-built character nor is she playing a part as Hamlet does. Ophelia receives instructions and receives orders but remains unaware of the general plot. It is therefore easy for Hamlet to expose her and make sure that she betrays herself.

The character of Ophelia is strongly dependent to Hamlet's one. As says Lee Edwards, «we can imagine Hamlet's story without Ophelia, but Ophelia literally has no story without Hamlet».[36] When Hamlet asks Ophelia where Polonious is, the prince is perfectly aware that the girl's father is hiding along with Cladious behind one of the tapestries spying on the conversation. When Ophelia responds by saying that her father is at home Hamlet understands his game, he realizes that Ophelia lies and has chosen to be faithful to her father.

For Hamlet it also becomes clear that he can no longer trust her and is bitter and disappointed. She has completely lost the trust he had in the female universe. With his words he paints a very bad and disenchanted portrait of women, influenced by his opinion towards Ophelia and her mother. Women thus become creatures of dubious morality and double face.

Throughout the dialogue with Ophelia, Hamlet's attitude is aimed at highlighting his altered mental state (simulated) and thanks to this Ophelia is mistakenly convinced of the madness of the prince. Polonious attributes the reason for the disease to the impossibility of love between him and Ophelia while Claudius, more intelligent, reads in Hamlet's words a threat that he may have been exposed to.

The end of the dialogue with the prince marks for Ophelia the point at which she begins her personal descent into madness, in this case real. This madness has as its acme the scene V in Act IV:

OPHELIA Sings How should I your true love know From another one? By his cockle hat and staff, And his sandal shoon.
QUEEN GERTRUDE Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song?

36 Lee Edwards, 'The Labors of Psyche', *Critical Inquiry*, 6 (1979), 36.

OPHELIA Say you? nay, pray you, mark. *Sings* He is dead and gone, lady, He is dead and gone; At his head a grass-green turf, At his heels a stone.
QUEEN GERTRUDE Nay, but, Ophelia,--
OPHELIA Pray you, mark. *Sings* White his shroud as the mountain snow,[37]
(Act 4 scene 2, verses 3-34)

Ophelia enters the scene singing and answers the questions of the king in a disconnected and delirious way, denoting a psychological collapse and a detachment from reality. We will then learn through the words of Gertrude, act IV scene VII, about the sad epilogue of Ophelia : the young woman has taken her own life drowning herself.

QUEEN GERTRUDE One woe doth tread upon another's heel, So fast they follow; your sister's drown'd, Laertes.
LAERTES Drown'd! O, where?
QUEEN GERTRUDE There is a willow grows aslant a brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream;
There with fantastic garlands did she come
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them:
There, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke;
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide;
And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up:
Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes;
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element: but long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.[38]   (Act 4, scene 7, verses 163-183)

Ophelia's fate, however, is also doomed not only by the court plots and decisions of her family, but mainly by the entire system in which she was born and moves. The mentality of the Elizabethan era in which the story of Hamlet takes place wants the woman bound to the role of submissive to the man, be it husband or father. The will of the woman is therefore not taken into account and her

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37 William Shakespeare : Hamlet (1601)
38 Ibidem

judgment is not given any importance.

Ophelia is not only a woman but also a daughter: the will she must follow is her father's. For his part, Polonius does not want his daughter to be together with Hamlet; he does not believe that the prince's love is sincere but only an infatuation. He is wrong because Hamlet is, at least initially, in love with Ophelia.

The girl is then stuck in a dead-end situation. Whatever decision she makes will end up disrespecting his family or losing his virtue, because of this he totally loses control and ends up going crazy. Her only purpose was not to hurt anyone, yet she ends up feeling guilty for disappointing everyone. As to the madness of Ophelia, it may attributed to both the death of her father which occurred in violent and unclear circumstances and to the distance from her brother Laertes, two central figures for the young woman and on which she relied completely. A similar opinion is that held by Caroll Camden:

Ophelia now indeed speaks of her father, saying that she cannot help weep- ing "to think they should lay him i' the cold ground". After she makes her exit, the King repeats his first diagnosis, saying, "this is the poison of deep grief; it springs all from her father's death"'. But of course Claudius has his own axe to grind since he wishes to stir Laertes up to ridding him of Hamlet. We can allow the statement that Ophelia's words and actions spring from deep grief, but not all from the death of Polonius.[39]

From a lexical and content point of view, Hamlet's attitude towards Ophelia and Gertrude, and by extension of the entire female universe since these two represent the totality of the female roles in the drama, can be perceived as a deep hatred or contempt. Yet,there are other lines of thought that see in the attitude of the prince the consequence of the deceptions and betrayals suffered, some scholars use the word cynicism to describe this, cynicism as result of the different perception he matures «In this analysis, the essence of "Hamlet" is the central character's changed perception of his mother as a whore because of her failure to remain faithful to Old Hamlet. In consequence, Hamlet loses his faith in all women, treating Ophelia as if she too were a whore and dishonest with

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39 Caroll Camden :" On Ophelia's Madness" (Shakespeare Quarterly , Spring, 1964, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Spring, 1964), pp. 247-255 Published by: Oxford University Pres)

Hamlet ».[40]

Analyzing the character of Ophelia from a Goffmanian point of view, we could rank the young woman among those that the sociologist defines as *discrepant roles.* Those are roles that do not conform to the general scheme and have cognitive characteristicsor behavioral that place them in a position outside the equipes. There are several kinds of discrepant roles; Ophelia may belong to the category of informers that Goffman describes in these terms: «The informer is someone who pretends to the performers to be a member of their team, is allowed to come backstage and to acquire destructive information, and then openly or secretly sells out the show to the audience.»[41]

In Hamlet such discrepant roles play an important function, especially when we focus our attention on those situations where the characters are alone or in small groups and they speak about some others. In the chapter dedicated to discrepant roles, Goffman argues:

One overall objective of any team is to sustain the definition of the situation that its performance fosters. This will involve the over-communication of some facts and the under-communication of others. Given the fragility and the required expressive coherence of the reality that is dramatized by a performance, there are usually facts which, if attention is drawn to them during the performance, would discredit, disrupt, or make useless the impression that the performance fosters. These facts may be said to provide 'destructive information[42]

40 Ghanim Obeyed Oteiwy :”Woman Frailty in Shakspeare's“Hamlet” (Kufa University - College of Education)
41 Erving Goffman:”The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life pg. 90 (1959)
42 Erving Goffman:”The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life pg. 87 (1959)

*Hamlet'*s ending

Goffman theorizes a possible collapse of society in the shape of a theatrical representation if the mutual collaboration not to reveal the masks of each other were to fail; the glue that holds together social relationships is precisely the mutual support for the staging of individuals. What prevents the representation from failing is the keeping of what Goffman calls dark secrets: «These consist of facts about a team which it knows and conceals and which are incompatible with the image of self that the team attempts to maintain before its audience. Dark secrets are, of course, double secrets: one is the crucial fact that is hidden and another is the fact that crucial facts have not been openly admitted»[43].

The fall of the masks leaves the social actor "naked" in front of the eyes of others. Goffman compares this fact to the violation of the actor's backstage. In this context, backstage for the actor takes on the contours of a sacred place,an inviolable space. Goffman expands the concept by taking into consideration also the analysis of the language used by the actor in different situations:

Throughout our society there tends to be one informal or backstage language of behaviour, and another language of behaviour for occasions when a performance is being presented. The backstage language consists of reciprocal first-naming, co-operative decision-making, profanity, open sexual remarks, elaborate griping, smoking, rough informal dress, 'sloppy' sitting and standing posture, use of dialect or sub-standard speech, mumbling and shouting, playful aggressivity and 'kidding,' inconsiderateness for the other in minor but potentially symbolic acts, minor physical self-involvements such as humming, whistling, chewing, nibbling, belching, and flatulence. The frontstage behaviour language can be taken a s the absence (and in some se n se the opposite) of this. In general, then, backstage conduct is one which allows minor acts which might easily be taken as symbolic of intimacy and disrespect for others present and for the region, while front region conduct is one which disallows such potentially offensive behaviour. [44]

A change in language depending on the area in which the character is located can be observed in the third act of *Hamlet*,

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43 Erving Goffman : The Presentation Of Self In Everyday Life (Pag. 87) (1959)
44 Erving Goffman : The Presentation Of Self In Everyday Life (Pag. 76) (1959)

especially if we examine the character of Claudius. If we consider the tone of the speech that the king makes during scene 1, we can see a change in the way Claudius addresses Polonius and then instead in the way he speaks to himself. When he is alone and not afraid of being discovered, Claudius is himself and calmly reflects on the faults committed. Following the scheme proposed by Goffman, it is therefore clear that the two attitudes cannot be reversed: Claudius can never bring his real nature to the stage, while safely away from his audience he is free from these constraints.

Between Claudius and his fellowships we can so observe another equipe which acts in opposition to Hamlet's, Claudius' team aims to protect the King and keep him in his place, creating an occult plot aimed at disorienting Hamlet.

If we take into consideration three moments throughout the first scene, we can then observe the shift in tone and contents.

- When he speaks with Rosencratz

  And can you,by no drift of circumstance,
  Get from him why he puts on this confusion,
  Grating so harshly all his days of quiet
  With turbulent and dangerous lunacy?[45]

(Act 3, Scene 1, Verses 1-3)
- When he speaks with Gertrude

  Sweet Gertrude, leave us too;
  For we have closely sent for Hamlet hither,
  That he, as 'twere by accident, may here
  Affront Ophelia:
  Her father and myself, lawful espials,
  Will so bestow ourselves that, seeing, unseen,
  We may of their encounter frankly judge,
  And gather by him, as he is behaved,
  If 't be the affliction of his love or no
  That thus he suffers for.[46]

Act 3, Scene 1, verses 28-37)

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45 William Shakespeare : Hamlet (1600)
46 Ibidem

- *When he is alone : Aside*

  O, 'tis too true!
  How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!
  The harlot's cheek, beautied with plastering art,
  Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it
  Than is my deed to my most painted word:
  O heavy burthen! [47]

(Act 3, Scene 1, verses 48-54)

Characters such as Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, if read in a Goffmanian perspective can fall into the category of discrepant roles, specifically all three can fall within the "shills". Goffman describes this special category as follows:

A shill is someone who acts as though he were an ordinary member of the audience but is in fact in league with the performers. Typically, the shill either provides a visible model for the audience of the kind of response the performers are seeking or provides the kind of audience response that is necessary at the moment for the development of the performance[48]

In contrast, in scene 3 of the same act, once his faults have been discovered, Claudius finds himself vulnerable and confesses to heaven his crimes. In doing so he is spied on by his nephew, yet Hamlet is still immersed in his doubts and does not decide to take action and kill him. According to him, killing him while he is in the act of praying would guarantee him an entry in Paradise, something that his father had not been granted.

        O, my offence is rank it smells to heaven;
        It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,
        A brother's murder. Pray can I not,
        Though inclination be as sharp as will:
        My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent;
        And, like a man to double business bound,
        I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
        And both neglect. What if this cursed hand
        Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
        Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
        To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy

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47 William Shakespeare : Hamlet (1600)
48 Erving Goffman : The Presentation Of Self In Everyday Life (pag. 90) (1959)

But to confront the visage of offence?
And what's in prayer but this two-fold force,

To be forestalled ere we come to fall,
Or pardon'd being down? Then I'll look up;
My fault is past. But, O, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder'?
That cannot be; since I am still possess'd
Of those effects for which I did the murder [49]

(Act 3, Scene 3, verses 36-54)

Some scholars attribute to this juncture the point where Hamlet's doubts manifest themselves in the most evident way. The Christian nature of Hamlet is here the moral strenght that leads him to hesitate. Miriam Joseph says : «On his way he sees the king kneeling and raises his sword to exe- cute justice upon the regicide. But blinded by surging hate, he suddenly conceives that it would hardly be revenge " To take him in the purging of his soul" (III. iii. 85) and so send him to heaven»[50] To clarify her point of view upon the nature of this Shakespeare's drama, she then concludes :

The prayer scene, which is at the heart of this Christian tragedy, is a stroke of consummate dramatic genius. Shakespeare simultaneously poses the most intense theological and dramatic questions and temporarily resolves the former with the latter. The prayer of Claudius is a supreme example of sound Christian doctrine and searching ethical analysis, revealing the clear mind and sinful heart of the man. In true perspective he sees his crime akin to Cain's (III. iii. 37). He realizes that he lacks the single-mindedness that true prayer demands and that even though his own condition is most fit for the exercise of God's boundless mercy, he cannot be pardoned unless he gives up Ihis ambition, his crown, and his queen, for which he committed murder. He cannot repent because his evil will would again make[51]

From this analysis we can see how Goffman's thought on the separation of spaces can be applied. Hamlet manages to discover the nature of his uncle because he violates his sacred space and the intimacy of his backstage. On the other hand,continuing with a Goffmanian interpretation of Shakespeare's drama, we can instead

49 William Shakespeare : Hamlet (Act 3,Scene 3 (36-54) (1600)
50 Miriam Joseph : "Hamlet," a Christian Tragedy (Studies in Philology , Apr., 1962, Vol. 59, No. 2, Part 1 (Apr.,
     1962), pp. 119-140 Published by: University of North Carolina Press
51 Ibidem

ascribe to the fall of Hamlet a factor linked to his cynicism. Hamlet begins to lose sight of the goal of his mission as soon as he begins to doubt the validity of the mission and the nature of the ghost. When he is no longer fully convinced of the goodness of his plan, his mask begins to fall apart : «And we may even expect to find typical careers of faith, with the individual starting out with one kind of involvement in the performance he is required to give, then moving back and forth several times between sincerity and cynicism before completing all the phases and turningpoints of self-belief for a person of his station».[52]

Continuing to follow the Goffmanian perspective, it is possible to include all the aforementioned characters into another macro-category, traitors. In refering to them, Goffman says:

If it appears that the individual first joined the team in a sincere way and not with the premeditated plan of disclosing its 90 secrets, we sometimes call him a traitor, turncoat, or quitter, especially if he is the sort of person who ought to have made a decent team-mate. The individual who all along has meant to inform on the team, and originally joins only for this purpose, is sometimes called a spy. It has frequently been noted, of course, that informers, whether traitors or spies, are often in an excellent position to play a double game, selling out the secrets of th o se who buy secrets from them.

Everyone has in fact stained himself with this guilt; Claudius betrayed his brother and by extension the entire kingdom, Gertrude betrayed the family, Hamlet, marrying Claudius while Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern betrayed Hamlet in the moment they chose to be loyal to the new king.

Trying to assume the possibility of an opposite front among Hamlet's acquaintances, there are not many characters aligned with the prince. One above all is Horatio who, from the beginning of the story, is faithful to the young Hamlet. Horatio never changes his position, he was loyal to the old Hamlet and remains so also towards the young prince. In describing his role and importance Andrew Hui writes: «Trying to decipher what and whose philosophy it is prompts us to think about Horatio's larger function in the play, for he seems to me the most underappreciated character in Hamlet criticism. I propose that he is one of the most crucial: more than a

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52 Erving Goffman : The Presentation Of Self In Everyday Life (pag. 12) (1959)

spectator, he drives the plot at the beginning, interprets it in the middle, and narrates it at the end.»[53]

If we want now to describe the character of Horatio in a Goffmanian way, he can be considered as a confidant for Hamlet and a member of his team and so as «a person in whom another confides, unlike the service specialist, does not make a business of receiving such confidances; he accepts the information without accepting a fee, as an expression of the friendship, trust, and regard the informant feels for him»[54]. In fact, Horatio will be the only one to remain next to Hamlet until the last moments of the prince's life, and Hamlet will entrust him with the mission of narrating the events that have happened:

HAMLET Heaven make thee free of it! I follow thee. I am dead, Horatio. Wretched queen, adieu! You that look pale and tremble at this chance, That are but mutes or audience to this act, Had I but time--as this fell sergeant, death, Is strict in his arrest--O, I could tell you-- But let it be. Horatio, I am dead; Thou livest; report me and my cause aright To the unsatisfied.
HORATIO Never believe it: I am more an antique Roman than a Dane: Here's yet some liquor left.
HAMLET As thou'rt a man, Give me the cup: let go; by heaven, I'll have't. O good Horatio, what a wounded name, Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me! If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart Absent thee from felicity awhile, And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain, To tell my story. March afar off, and shot within What warlike noise is this?
OSRIC Young Fortinbras, with conquest come from Poland To the ambassadors of England gives This warlike volley.
HAMLET O, I die, Horatio; The potent poison quite o'er-crows my spirit: I cannot live to hear the news from England; But I do prophesy the election lights On Fortinbras: he has my dying voice; So tell him, with the occurrents, more and less, Which have solicited. The rest is silence. (Dies)
HORATIO Now cracks a noble heart. Good night sweet prince: And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest! [55]

(Act 5, Scene 2, Verses 325-353)

Under this specific aspect, it is possible to observe the loyalty expressed by Horatio in contrast to the attitude of two other characters who are reintroduced to us as friends of the young

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53 Andrew Hui : Horatio's Philosophy in Hamlet (Renaissance Drama , Vol. 41, No. 1/2 (Fall 2013), pp. 151-171)
54 Erving Goffman : The Presentation Of Self In Everyday Life (pag. 100) (1959)
55 William Shakespeare: Hamlet (1600)

prince, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. J. Duncan Spaeth focuses on this: «Shakespeare as is his manner emphasizes Horatio's Hamlet by way of dramatic contrast, with the Hamlet of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Like Horatio, they are boyhood friends and fellow-students of Hamlet, but while Horatio puts friendship above self-interest, they put self-interest and advancement at court, above friendship, crooking the pregnant hinges of the knee where thrift may follow fawn»[56].

In a scenario like Elsinore in which no one really trusts the other but, on the contrary, always looks for a way to discover the secrets to use them to their advantage, a character like that of Horatio is certainly an exception, an honest friendship without ulterior motives like the one between Hamlet and Horatio has been the subject of several essays including that of Robert C. Evans who writes: «The friendship theme is sounded explicitly again when Hamlet says he would be unwilling to hear even Horatio's "enemy" accuse him of a "truant disposition" (1.2.169-70). Both Horatio's humility and Hamlet's solicitous compliment show their potential as friends to themselves and others, while Horatio's brief and tactful comment about Gertrude's quick remarriage (1. 2.179) show at once his intelligence, discretion, moderation, and reasonableness - all qualities valuable in a good friend».[57]

The same author offers another key of lecture and hints at a more subtle reasoning: «It is also possible, however, that Hamlet is so gracious to Horatio precisely because he knows that Horatio is both his so- cial inferior and a relative stranger. Horatio, in short, poses no present or even potential threat; he can be welcomed as a friend because he is not a possible enemy. His distance from Claudius's court, in fact, probably makes him attractive to the prince. All in all, then, when Hamlet offers to exchange the "name" of "good friend" with Horatio (1.2.163), we cannot be sure whether the prince is motivated by mere courtesy or by potentially deeper feelings».[58]

This last point of view is closer to Goffman who sees friendship

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56 J. Duncan Spaeth : Horatio's Hamlet (The Shakespeare Association Bulletin , January, 1949, Vol. 24, No. 1 (January, 1949), pp. 37-47 Published by: Oxford University Press

57 Robert C. Evans : Friendship in "Hamlet" (: Comparative Drama , Spring 1999, Vol. 33, No. 1, Tragedy's Insights: Identity, Polity, Theodicy (Spring 1999), pp. 88-124 Published by: Comparative Drama)

58 Ibidem

relationships as another stage in which people performs their masks. The sociologist tends to equate the role of friend to that of co-primary and member of the team, stripping him of the real affective value: «Similarly, there are very few friendship relationships in which there is not some occasion when attitudes expressed about the friend- behind his back are grossly incompatible with the ones expressed about him to his face. Sometimes, of course, the opposite of derogation occurs, and performers praise their audience in a way that would be impermissible for them to do in the actual presence of the audience».[59]

59 Erving Goffman : The Presentation Of Self In Everyday Life (pag. 108) (1959)

Conclusions

I have tried to present a different approach to the literature based on the analysis with the use of theories developed in other areas.I chose as a parameter the theory of Erving Goffman and his dramaturgical model because it allowed me to analyze the characters not only as simple roles within the work but as individuals with social characteristics common to those of human beings.

I tried to analyze the most important scenes of *Hamlet* and its characters by offering an interpretation of the same under a Goffmanian perspective, often resorting to examples proposed by the sociologist himself and that were well integrated with the story narrated by Shakespeare.

For the sake of completeness, I decided to also include theories developed starting from dheim involving large crowds those of Goffman and that have in those of the Canadian sociologist their fulcrum. I preferred to use in my work those of Goffman, to those of, for example, Emile Durkheim becaus I wanted to examine those social mechanics that are aimed at small groups of people (the so-called microritual) while those of Durkheim involved large numbers of people (macrorituals).

To conclude, I would like to propose alternative thoughts to that of Goffman, scholars and specialists who, without diminishing the importance of Goffmanian theories, have expressed critical issues on the thought of the same, emphasizing gaps or errors in the development of some theories.

Among the most frequent criticisms of Goffman is that the sociologist sees in individuals immutable subjects, with a rigid and immutable way of doing things. Gregory W.H. Smith writes:

The Goffmanian individual is commonly regarded as a highly calculating, manipulative, egoistic, Machiavellian creature. Yet here, in the very first few pages of Presentation, Goffman claimed that humans tend to be better placed to detect manipulative, strategizing conduct than they are at enacting it. One of the perversities of Goffman interpretation has been for commentators to fail to ponder the detail of his writings, with the result that his often qualified and conditional statements get reduced to simplistic picture.[60]

W.H. Smith also criticizes Goffman and reproaches him for his use of Sartre:

Goffman's use of Sartre was as a resource to fix a sociological problem. This approach became Goffman's standard way of treating philosophical discourse. The ideas of philosophers were scanned for possibilities for their incorpo ration into a sociological framework. They served as sources of concepts or hypotheses worth testing empirically or sketches of social processes, no more.[61]

And lastly he conclude his analysis by criticizing Goffman's frame theory

Goffman took issue with Schutz in at least two major ways. First, Goffman doubted that everyday life is a single distinct, paramount reality. Schutz did not catalogue the variety of features of everyday life to Goffman's sociological satisfaction. An adequate categorization of the everyday, Goffman felt, would fold in elements of make-believe (day dreaming, joking, theatrical gestures), not divide them off as separate finite provinces of meaning. Second, Goffman considered the description of finite provinces of meaning in terms such as "cognitive style" and "motivational relevance" to be vague and less precise than an account phrased in terms of frame functions and the structural features of frames.[62]

Even the theatrical metaphor used by Erving Goffman to describe the implements of his theory was questioned. One of the most riskfull passages is the direct connection between theatric stages and real life that Goffman doesn't seem to take too much into consideration:

The metaphor is also very dangerous, I believe. For it is so powerful that it prompts

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60 Gregory W.H. Smith :Enacted Others: Specifying Goffman's Phenomenological Omissions and Sociological Accomplishments (Human Studies , Oct., 2005, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Oct., 2005), pp. 397-415 Published by: Springer
61 Ibidem
62 Ibidem

us to overlook fundamental differences between performances onstage and behaviors offstage. Labeling the latter "performances" conceals as much as it reveals, and the concealment is insidious because it conceals itself as a concealing; that is, we attend only to what is revealed. Part of the problem is that the theatrical metaphor is not fresh. Long ago theatrical ideas were applied beyond the theatre and embedded themselves in ordinary language and experience in key notions such as "role," e.g., the "roles" of physician, lawyer, teacher. In this paper I attempt to refresh theatrical metaphor by regrounding it in the literal performances of actors onstage. Strangely, "role theorists" typically know little about the theatre[63]

The problem pointed out is the apparent ease with which Goffman translates the theatrical dimension to the social dimension without making changes in the analysis of the roles. What, in Wilshire opinion, is achieved is a rigidity in pigeonholing subjects within immutable roles:

When we deliberately transfer the notion of role playing to offstage life we carry with us, smuggled in, the notion of the fictionality of the actor's portrayal. This tends to eat away from the inside our sense of the reality, seriousness and appropriateness of our "role playing" offstage. We are tragically at least wretchedly divided against ourselves: on the one hand we dimly sense that we are responsible for our "role playing" offstage in a way that an actor is not for his onstage, and that it pertains to our actuality as persons in a way that his does not to his actuality as a person.[64]

Other scholars pointed out the importance of Goffman's theories in recognizing women rights, especially in work places and see in his words some arguments that have preceded the current feminist waves and campaigns for gender equality. Goffman said «What the human nature of males and females really consists of... is a capacity to learn to provide and to read depictions of masculinity and femininity and a willingness to adhere to a schedule for presenting these pictures, and this capacity they have by virtue of being persons, not females or males».[65] Candace West depicts an interesting analysis of the sociologist with the aim «to put Goffman into feminist perspective-to call attention to his contributions to our understanding of the micropolitical structure, and to feminist theory more generally»[66] and concludes by saying

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63 Bruce Wilshire : The Dramaturgical Model of Behavior: Its Strengths and Weaknesses (Symbolic Interaction , Vol. 5, No. 2 (Fall 1982), pp. 287-298)

64 Ibidem

65 Erving Goffman *:* Gender Advertisements (1988)

66 Candace West : Goffman in Feminist Perspective (appeared on Sociological Perspectives , Autumn, 1996, Vol. 39,

that «Goffman's greatest gift to feminist theory is baldly apparent: opening up the possibility of studying the "personal"- even as we find it on the streets, in talk, in public and private places-as a sociological topic. What was so distinctive, so dramatic about his incursion was the notion that you could "go look" at this sphere, in the fundamentally ordinary sense of watching and listening to people».[67]

From my point of view, Goffman's theories, even if supported by examples and detailed investigations conducted by the sociologist himself, suffer from a fundamental error. Goffman homogenizes individuals too much and standardizes behaviors almost eliminating the possibility that people act according to free will and not according to a role set by the category they play.

I believe that it is possible to analyze the characters of a literary work as social actors with clumsy characteristics precisely because they are individuals with fixed and immutable characteristics, who repeat their behaviors always in the same way as in the various replicas of the same theatrical performance.

It is in this last aspect that I personally felt the greatest detachment from Goffman's theories where the individual is busy playing a role and holding a staging when interacting with others, without taking into account the possible variations in bonds and in the various possibilities of social dynamics. I chose *Hamlet* as a work of literature precisely because the characters for the entire duration of the work are engaged in playing a role while interacting with each other and hiding their real emotions.

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