



A DECONSTRUCTIVE COMPARISON OF THE ANACHRONISM IN THE HERMENEUTICS OF GADAMER AND HIRSCH WITH A REFERENCE TO “KING OEDIPUS” AND “HAMLET”

GADAMER VE HİRSCH'ÜN YORUMBİLİM FELSEFESİNDEKİ ANAKRONİZMİN “KRAL OEDİPUS” VE “HAMLET”E ATFEN YAPISÖKÜMCÜ BİR KARŞILAŞTIRMASI

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Abstract

Literary criticism has undergone a long journey with the discussion of authorial meaning and intention, regarding the historical period in which the literary text has been produced and interpreted. Hans-Georg Gadamer and Eric Donald Hirsch Jr. stand out as two canonical names that have led intense discussions on the problem of historicity and anachronism, and have contributed to the science of interpretation—hermeneutics—in ways contrasting with each other. This comparative essay rests on their major works—*Validity in Interpretation*, by Hirsch, and *Truth and Method*, by Gadamer. It looks through the lenses of Deconstruction, however, as it attempts to apply their hermeneutics in literature. This analysis is limited to the primary works of Gadamer and Hirsch because it mainly seeks to contrast their positioning on the basis of historicity, by making succinct references to two masterpieces in literature—Sophocles' play *King Oedipus* and W. Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. It intends to demonstrate how Deconstructionist criticism, particularly through the ideas of Barthes and Derrida, creates a theoretical and philosophical ground for the discussion of literature in general and for anachronistic reading in literary texts.

Öz

Edebiyat eleştirisi, bir edebi metinde yazarın kurguladığı anlamı ve niyeti metnin kaleme alındığı ve yorumlandığı tarihsel dönemi de göz önünde bulundurup sorgulayarak uzun bir yolculuk yapmıştır. Hans-Georg Gadamer ve Eric Donald Hirsch Jr., tarihsellik sorunu ve anakronizm üzerine yoğun tartışmalara öncülük eden ve Yorumbilim'e, (hermeneutics) birbirlerine zıt biçimlerde katkıda bulunan iki geleneksel isim olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Bu karşılaştırmalı çalışma, Hirsch'ün *Yorumda Geçerlilik (Validity in Interpretation)* ve Gadamer'in *Hakikat ve Yöntem (Truth and Method)* adlı başyapıtlarına dayanmaktadır. Bu çalışma aynı zamanda Yapısökümcü eleştirinin merceğinden bakarak, Yorumbilim'i edebi eserlere uygulamayı hedeflemektedir. Bu analiz, Gadamer ve Hirsch'ün birincil eserleriyle sınırlıdır çünkü edebiyattaki iki şahesere—Sofokles'in oyunu *Kral Oedipus* ve William Shakespeare'in oyunu *Hamlet*'e kısa atıflarda bulunarak, Gadamer ve Hirsch'ün konularını sadece tarihsellik kavramı temelinde karşılaştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmanın bir başka amacı da Yapısökümcü eleştirinin, özellikle de Barthes ve Derrida'nın fikirlerinin, genel olarak edebiyat tartışması yürütmek ve edebi metinlerde anakronik okuma yapmak için nasıl bir teorik ve felsefi zemin yarattığını göstermektir.

Introduction

One of the most thriving questions even in today's literature classroom is the question pertaining to the interpretation of the authorial meaning and intention in a particular literary text. It is a tendency that never seems to fade and, indeed, this quest for an ultimate, finalised meaning comes as no surprise. The human search for absolutes has not come to an end, although post-structuralist philosophy has long transcended questions and matters that wilfully seek to re-establish absolutist registers of human thought. The displacement of the subject and the questionable

autonomy of the author are among the most conspicuous topics for argumentation in a post-Freudian, post-Nietzschean and post-Heideggerian era. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, plurality, ambiguity, multiplicity, evasion, deferral and dissemination become the connotations, if not the coinages, of *meaning*—a domain which can never be taken for granted, and which has to evolve continually. And still, even today, readers of literature would be puzzled by all the dubious disclosures of particular texts, and will find themselves asking: Yes, but to what extent the author really has intended to communicate such and such a message? How do we know if we are not making inferences that the author/ writer may have never intended to convey? How are we expected to decide which inferences are most reliable and relevant? Literary theory and criticism come as an aid when we confront issues related to meaning and authorial intention.

Most modern critical approaches have inherited the ontological and epistemological problems of the metaphysics of presence. However, with the more transitional status of thinkers and scholars such as Freud, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Barthes and Derrida, one has had to come to terms with the fact that registers of Western metaphysics—truth, logos, subject, ego, history and linearity—can no longer be accepted as unshakeable, holistic or harmonious. They are the coinages of an ancient human search for origin, a search that has been moulded and recreated by metaphysics of presence, by positivism, empiricism, materialism and the middle-class consciousness of Western epistemology. As argued by Roland Barthes in his famous essay “The Death of the Author,” the author of a literary text is a symbol of mastery, one with a deeply-rooted history of hegemony:

The author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the human person. It is thus logical that in literature it should be this positivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the person of the author. (119).

If we intend to undertake a discussion on post-structuralist theories and approaches to literature, we may embrace the philosophical positioning of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida as they enable us to delineate the margins of more absolutist, essentialist, and dogmatic interpretations and to understand the subversive nature of meaning-construction. While it is important to acknowledge

that the pursuit for truth or origin is part of a questioning mind, the dialectic of reading always fails to comply with one's already pre-established beliefs and convictions. Both philosophers announce the closure of the metaphysics of presence and of the privilege of speech over writing. For example, in "The Death of the Author," Barthes marks the transition to a new wave of thinking, whereby the authority and autonomy of the author have been recognised as shaken down, an empire no longer ruling, the authorial voice no longer considered domineering as an epitome of uniformity:

Who is speaking thus? [...] We shall never know, for the good reason that writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing [...] No doubt it has always been that way. As soon as a fact is narrated no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively [...] this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins. (118).

Similarly, in his major work *Of Grammatology*, Jacques Derrida speaks of the "usurpation" of writing, or, rather, arche-writing, and presents the act of writing as the greatest challenge to the phonocentrism and logocentrism of Western epistemology since Plato (36-44). It is exactly this arche-writing that disrupts and decentres the prioritised legs of the dual oppositions. *Différance* becomes the name of every disseminated or deferred meaning, as meaning always spills over words, and meaning can never be exhausted in its totality. Signifiers are thought as self-referential, bearing no internal truth in themselves. Thus the signifier and the signified slide under each other, and we are left with a cluster of phonetic signifiers that move within a continual play.

Gadamer and Hirsch's hermeneutics come to the scene when we begin to ask ourselves to what extent the authorial meaning in a literary text coincides with what the reader makes out of it. In this study, psychoanalysis is used only to establish an example through which we may be allowed to discuss anachronism in literary texts, and to make a few gestures to two literary classics—*Hamlet* and *King Oedipus*—with the purpose of showing how the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Hirsch differ on the basis of historicity. That is to say, the present study neither attempts to launch an analysis on the deconstructive nature of psychoanalytic criticism nor it aims to altogether deconstruct the approaches of Gadamer and

Hirsch. Rather, it aims to re-introduce first a fundamental question about the discussion of literary texts—to what extent must we assume that authors and literary texts mean what they mean, or, are in control of their own textual discourse? Second, it intends to unfold the fact that the autonomy of both the author and the reader as subjects is always evasive and transitory while it exposes why the emphasis on any master word or signifier may carry the implications of binary models and metaphysical oppositions. Third, it aims to demonstrate how we can benefit from deconstructive criticism when we intend to extend our practices in literary theory and literary interpretation. To fulfil such tasks, it may be necessary, first, to throw a retrospective look to the premises of the hermeneutics of Gadamer and Hirsch in order to advance the discussion of literature through the guidance of Barthes and Derrida.

Gadamer's Approach to Historicity

The impact of the philosophy of Martin Heidegger in hermeneutics is noteworthy as Heidegger's status stands out as a challenge to dualistic, metaphysical ways of thinking. With a major nod toward post-structuralist criticism, Heidegger attacks the ontological and epistemological positioning of the Western European mind, and he condemns it as the descendant of Platonic dualism. While Heidegger goes in search for the mysterious *Being* or *beings*, he puts under erasure (*sous rature*) all possible logoi which the human yearning for truth has invented and prioritised—presence, absence, origin, essence, subject, object, etc. As Terry Eagleton argues, too, Heidegger partly decentres the human subject from an imaginary position of dominance since human existence is a dialogue with the world (63). It is never something which he can grasp as a finished object, but always a question of fresh possibility, always problematic; and this is equivalent to saying that human being is constituted by history, or time (63). Understanding is radically historical: it is always caught up with the concrete situation one is in, and that one is trying to surpass.

Heidegger's philosophy was a major influence on one of the most important figures in modern hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer. Ken M. Newton acknowledges that Gadamer developed Heidegger's contention that the historical and temporal situation of the interpreter can never be excluded from hermeneutics, and thus there is no escape from the hermeneutic circle (103). In his major work *Truth and Method*, Gadamer argues that the past can be grasped only through relating it to the present and makes an analogy between great architectural

monuments of the past and the buildings erected by the modern world of commerce (150). Understanding the past involves a “fusion of horizons” between the text as the embodiment of past experiences and the interests and even prejudices of its interpreter in the present and not, as Schleiermacher and Dilthey believed, the reconstruction of the text’s original context in its own terms with the interests and prejudices of its interpreter eliminated as far as possible (Newton 103-104).

Furthermore, in his major work, *Truth and Method*, Gadamer points out that language gains its true intellectual quality in writing, because when it is confronted with a written tradition, understanding consciousness acquires its full sovereignty (392). Gadamer argues that although writing seems to be a secondary phenomenon to language, in writing, the meaning of what is spoken exists purely for itself, completely detached from all emotional elements of expression and communication (*Truth and Method* 394). In essence, writing is central to the hermeneutical phenomenon because its detachment both from the writer or author and from a specifically addressed recipient or reader gives it a life of its own (*Truth and Method* 393). Gadamer insists that the understanding of something written is not the repetition of something that is past, but the sharing of a present meaning (394). Moreover, understanding is not a psychic transposition—“*the horizon of understanding cannot be limited either by what the writer originally had in mind, or by the horizon of the person to whom the text was originally addressed*” (396).

Gadamer largely subverts the long-held belief that the authorial/ original meaning is the most valid source of knowledge, and one’s task is to recreate the conditions of the past in order to render works of literature more understandable. According to Gadamer, literature is such a form of continuance that not only presents us with memorials and signs but also has acquired its own simultaneity with every present (*Truth and Method* 393). To understand literature does not mean primarily to reason one’s way back into the past, but to have a present involvement in what is said. It is not really about a relationship between persons, between the reader and the author (who is perhaps quite unknown), but about sharing in the communication that the text gives us. In other words, the meaning of a text, when we understand it, is quite independent of its author or the historical interpretation of the tradition as a literary source (393).

Meaning and Significance in Hirsch

Conversely, the American hermeneuticist Eric Donald Hirsch Jr., probably the most devoted defender of the traditional hermeneutic approach of Schleiermacher and Dilthey, opposes Heidegger and Gadamer because he believes that their form of hermeneutics leads to a total relativism (Newton 104). Hirsch argues that the interpreter of a text has a moral duty to understand it in relation to its original context. But Hirsch seeks to preserve some role for the role of the interpreter by drawing a distinction between meaning and significance. Whereas the meaning of a text remains constant, its significance will change in relation to the interests of its interpreters (Newton 104).

In his article “Three Dimensions of Hermeneutics,” Hirsch states that the nature of a text is to mean whatever we construe it to mean. He emphasises the need for a norm because the nature of a text is to have no meaning except that which an interpreter wills into existence (246). Hirsch points out that we, the interpreters, not our texts, are the makers of the meanings we understand, and text is only an occasion for meaning, in itself an ambiguous form devoid of the consciousness where meaning abides.

Hirsch refers to Schleiermacher’s canon implying that no text can legitimately mean at a later time what it could not have meant originally (“Three Dimensions of Hermeneutics” 247). However, this is not always the case. For instance, the ancient works of Homer and Vergil, who had been pagans, could not consciously have intended or communicated Christian meanings. Hirsch makes an allusion to Schleiermacher and the exegetes of the Middle Ages with the principle that “*everything in a given text which requires fuller interpretation need not be explained and determined exclusively from the linguistic domain common to the author and his original public*” (247). Hirsch claims that “*if an ancient text has been interpreted as a Christian allegory, that is unanswerable proof that it can be so interpreted*” (247). According to Hirsch, Schleiermacher’s canon is based upon a value preference, and not on theoretical necessity (248). Schleiermacher’s preference for original meaning over anachronistic meaning is ultimately an ethical choice.

In order to put forward “*a purely descriptive theoretical conception,*” Hirsch introduces the distinction between meaning and significance (249). In his earlier discussions, Hirsch equates meaning simply with the original meaning, but later he emphasises that the distinction between meaning and significance is not limited to

instances where meaning is equated with the author's original meaning; it holds as well for any and all instances of "anachronistic meaning." This enlarged definition of meaning comprises constructions where authorial will is partly or totally disregarded (250). For Hirsch, "*the important feature of meaning as distinct from significance is that meaning is the determinate representation of a text for an interpreter. An interpreted text is always taken to represent something, but that something can always be related to something else*" (250). Hirsch defines significance as "*meaning-as-related-to-something-else*" (250). In other words, it is any perceived relationship between construed verbal meaning and something else, a person, a conception, a situation, or anything imaginable (*Validity in Interpretation* 8; 140). In Hirsch's view, "*while meaning is a principle of stability in an interpretation, significance embraces a principle of change*" ("Three Dimensions of Hermeneutics" 250). Meaning for an interpreter may stay the same, whereas the meaningfulness (significance) of that meaning can change with the changing contexts in which that meaning is applied.

Terry Eagleton acknowledges that E. D. Hirsch's work is considerably indebted to Husserlian phenomenology (67). It does not follow for Hirsch, states Eagleton, that because the meaning of a work is identical with what the author meant by it at the time of writing, only one interpretation of the text is possible (67). There may be a number of different valid interpretations, but all of them must move within the "*system of typical expectations and probabilities*" which the author's meaning permits. Hirsch does not deny that a literary work may "mean" different things to different people at different times. But in the view of Hirsch, this is more a matter of the work's "significance" rather than its "meaning." "*Significances vary throughout history, whereas meanings remain constant; authors put in meanings, whereas readers assign significances*" (Eagleton 67).

Gadamer and Hirsch in Opposition

The different ethical preferences of Hirsch and Gadamer have given rise to mutual criticism. Hirsch criticised Gadamer because of the inadequacy of Gadamer's identifying textual meaning with "tradition" or some other changing norm on the level of scholarly interpretation (*Validity in Interpretation* 123). Gadamer had to insist that all textual interpretation must go beyond the author, must mean more than he or any individual interpreter could know or understand. Hirsch claimed that for Gadamer, all texts were like the Constitution and the Bible. On the other hand, Gadamer opposed Hirsch by stating that texts do not ask to be

understood as a living expression of the subjectivity of their writers (*Truth and Method* 396). For Gadamer, “*the meaning of a literary work is never exhausted by the author’s intention; as the work passes from one cultural or historical context to another, new meanings may be culled from it which were perhaps never anticipated by its author or contemporary audience*” (Eagleton 71). “*Hirsch would admit this in one sense but relegate it to the realm of ‘significance;’ for Gadamer, this instability is part of the very character of the work itself*” (71). Furthermore, Gadamer opposed Schleiermacher’s idea of determining the meaning of a text objectively by seeing it as a contemporary document and in relation to its original reader (*Truth and Method* 396). Gadamer pointed at the ambiguity of the term “contemporaneity” and “original reader.” Moreover, “*normative concepts such as the author’s meaning or the original reader’s understanding represent in fact only an empty space that is filled from time to time in understanding*” (397).

It may be acceptable to say that Gadamer’s propositions relatively acquiesce with the margins of post-structuralist criticism because he does not prioritise the sheer presence of the text’s author as a source of true knowledge. The transition to the post-structuralist era is marked with the act of undermining exactly this autonomy of the author, as Roland Barthes states in “The Death of the Author.” He explains why the author’s presence is craved for; it is because he is identified with a text’s most correct meaning, largely because the author is considered the *priori* of the text:

Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing [...] when the Author has been found, the text is explained—victory to the critic [...] In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered*; the structure can be followed, run (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. (121-122)

Therefore, it is agreeably more acceptable to say that Barthes coheres much closely with the propositions of Gadamer in that sense, as he claims that “*a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination,*” that is, the reader (122). Barthes announces the closure of an era which glorifies the author as the unifying principle

of the body of the literary text. Essentially, “The Death of the Author” becomes an epitome of the transition from structuralist to post-structuralist criticism.

Two Cases from Literature—*Hamlet* and *King Oedipus*

It is possible to trace Gadamer’s and Hirsch’s theoretical margins in two of the most well-known classical stories—*Hamlet* and *King Oedipus*. The problem of historicity and anachronism may be clearly identified and reflected in these texts, still considered cryptic by many. In Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, a question of the Oedipal in the play has been the concern of interpreters and readers of literature. From the opening scenes onwards, the play presents the idea of incest as one of the most despicable and abhorrent outcomes of human ambition; the marriage between Gertrude and the murderous uncle is represented as an ignoble act by the ghost of old Hamlet and the protagonist himself. The exchange of words between Gertrude and Hamlet in Act III, Scene IV when Hamlet urges his mother to abstain from sex with his uncle, reveals his disgust at the thought of their incestuous intercourse. However, whether the author Shakespeare wilfully intended to convey oedipal overtones in these moments or not seems to exceed the frame of hermeneutics and, consequently, expose the necessity for psychoanalytic criticism:

Nay, but to live/ In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,
Stew’d in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty! (iii, iv, 92-94).

If Shakespeare intended to suggest anything oedipal in his famous play, or whether he knew anything about such subconscious human schemes or not is not a matter of much discomfort and controversy in our present time. With the contribution of psychoanalytic criticism, the human psyche becomes a much more familiar domain on account of its relation to language. In *Hamlet and Oedipus* (1949), Ernest Jones makes a profound analysis by trying to convince the reader that Shakespeare’s play, indeed, epitomises Freudian themes. According to Jones, Hamlet’s continual delay of vengeance can be explained with the fact that “*the thought of incest and parricide combined is too intolerable to be borne*” (78). Other implications that Jones highlights as Oedipal are the moments when Claudius exclaims in Act IV, Scene VII: “*The queen his mother/ Lives almost by his looks*” (91), and “*No, good mother, here’s metal more attractive (93)*” when Hamlet “*plays Ophelia off against his mother*” (92).

With Hirsch recalled, the hermeneutical problematisation of the question of meaning in its relation to historicity relapses. Hirsch refers to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as an example of the distinction between meaning and significance, and while he argues that Shakespeare could not have known anything of Freudian psychology, many perceive that *Hamlet* does have Freudian implications (*Validity in Interpretation* 122):

Let us suppose, therefore, that Shakespeare *did* want to suggest Hamlet's sense of repugnance at the idea of his mother's sexual relationship with the murderer of his father, but *did not* mean to suggest that Hamlet entertained an unconscious wish to sleep with his mother. Although Freud has argued that every (nonfictional) male tends to have such a wish whether he knows it or not, we have nevertheless supposed that Shakespeare's Hamlet neither knew this nor dimly and unconsciously meant this [...] If we assert, as I have done, that only a re-cognitive interpretation is a valid interpretation, then we must, on the basis of our assumed premise about the play, say that the Freudian interpretation is invalid. It does not correspond to the author's meaning; it is an implication that cannot be subsumed under the type of meaning that Shakespeare (under our arbitrary supposition) willed. (122-123).

One is to conclude, therefore, that the Freudian interpretation of *Hamlet* would not constitute the text's meaning, but one of its significances. This anachronistic reading of *Hamlet* could be rendered valid only if it is perceived as the text's significance (or meaningfulness), and not as its meaning. According to Hirsch, meaning is what the interpreter actualises from a text; significance is that actual speaking as heard in a chosen and variable context of the interpreter's experiential world ("Three Dimensions of Hermeneutics" 250). This is also why Hirsch criticises Gadamer's view implying that all textual interpretation must go beyond the author, must mean more than he or any individual interpreter could know or understand (*Validity in Interpretation* 123).

Hirsch believes that this distinction between meaning and significance can resolve some of the disagreements in hermeneutics, and especially the disagreements over the concept of historicity. It is true that meaning is never limited to the author's intention or consciousness. Although a genuine certainty in interpretation may be impossible, Hirsch claims that the discipline must reach a consensus, "on the basis of what is known, that correct understanding has probably

[sic] been achieved. The issue is not whether certainty is accessible to the interpreter, but whether the author's intended meaning is accessible to him" (*Validity in Interpretation* 17).

In the light of the emphases that Hirsch and Gadamer make in their major works, one tends to accept the theory of Hirsch as a tribute to the past and Gadamer's as a tribute to the present. However, a distinction and a reduction like this one will probably be inadequate because the two critics do not necessarily propose a binary model; in their narratives, they expand, reverse, and transcend their own propositions. However, although they point at the inadequacies of each other's theories, both appear to be seeking a norm that will standardise the act of interpretation. Their approaches are partly essentialist and normative because both make an emphasis on a particular master signifier—in Gadamer, it is the reader's positioning in view of the concept of historicity, in Hirsch, it is the original intention of the author. Hirsch's distinction between meaning and significance, no matter how expanded the term significance appears to be, has metaphysical connotations. If we take Hirsch's approach as a starting point, we have to contend with the idea that whatever does not constitute the original meaning or intention of the author, must necessarily be classified as the significance or meaningful-ness of a textual reading. Moreover, as Hirsch argues in "Three Dimensions of Hermeneutics," "*meaning is the determinate representation of a text for an interpreter*" (250). This, too, appears more like an idealistic presupposition, because absolutes and clear-cut distinctions need to be avoided when we no longer seek perfect signifiers in the domain and register of a subject already accepted as decentred, and of history and linearity considered disrupted. As Derrida argues in *Of Grammatology*, there should be no master word, no master signifier that will "*present itself as the mark of anterior presence, origin*" (Spivak xv, lxxi).

In Derrida's discourse, the instability of the linguistic sign and the dissolution of the signifier into the signified and vice versa, testify to the fact that categories such as past and present, meaning and significance, time and space may only bear the imprints of Platonic metaphysics of presence, of dual oppositions that prioritise one transcendental signified, which is too evasive to be even pinned down:

By leaving open this possibility—and it is inherent even in the opposition signifier/signified, that is in the sign [...] what I have proposed to call a 'transcendental signified,' which in and of itself, in its essence, would refer to no signifier, would exceed the chain of

signs, and would no longer itself function as a signifier. On the contrary, though, from the moment that one questions the possibility of such a transcendental signified, and that one recognizes that every signified is also in the position of a signifier, the distinction between signified and signifier becomes problematical at its root. (“Semiology and Grammatology” 19-20).

Therefore, with a decentred conceptuality of the self, of the subject, of history and time, the necessity to avoid absolutist or prioritised grounds for reading literary texts becomes evident. Moreover, there are such timeless and space-less human archetypes that one can never ascertain to what extent an author may be wittingly and wilfully conveying a genuine meaning through the language of literature. Hypothetically, if Shakespeare may not have intended an oedipal implication in *Hamlet* (on grounds of Hirsch’s presupposition), Sophocles, too, may not have intended one in, say, *King Oedipus*, because he can’t have known about it. If his protagonist has never been meant to have an inborn, subconscious desire for the mother, Jocasta, then only random accidents and tragic circumstances have led to his cohabitation with her. Sophocles never read about Freud’s psychoanalysis, so there was no way for him to have known anything about the Freudian concept of a divided self, of the unconscious, and the domain of the so-called “id.” However, there is a moment in the play *King Oedipus* when Jocasta’s utterances pretentiously call to our attention this universal, timeless, archetypal knowledge; words that indeed will continue to haunt our minds:

Fear? What has a man to do with fear?

Chance rules our lives, and the future is all unknown

Best live as best we may, from day to day.

Nor need this mother-marrying frighten you;

Many a man has dreamt as much. Such things

Must be forgotten, if life is to be endured. (Sophocles, qtd. in Watling, 52).

How could possibly Sophocles have known that, universally, and, subconsciously, one of the greatest fears of man is the repressed fear of making the mother an “object of desire”—a nightmare that may have tormented him ever since several centuries before? “*Many a man has dreamt as much*” is such an utterance that it shatters all kinds of preconceived ideas of what the human mind knows and does not know about psychoanalysis. The meaning of Sophocles’ text is ultimately Oedipal, for the simple fact that Oedipus cohabitated with his mother and we know

about the true nature of this universal taboo, but how is it possible that Sophocles knew about such a primal, archetypal fear which he verbalised in the words of Jocasta? Since we interpret Sophocles' text in terms of psychoanalysis, in terms of modern psychology, we also relate it to our present; therefore, this must be also substituted for the text's significance (as in Hirsch). Or should one speculate that Sophocles has had an extraordinary, almost prophetic ability to foresee such things about human psyche that can be proven quite valid and meaningful regardless of the touch of historicity? It is impossible not to read Sophocles' text in its relation to the present history and present knowledge, the way Gadamer urged, because it would not have become sensible enough for us to rationalise Oedipus' moral blindness, his lack of self-awareness and self-knowledge. On the other hand, Sophocles' ancient knowledge is all there, it stands out with its own rationale even without our modern presuppositions, its truth and validity self-evident, self-justifying, though painful. Therefore, what we assume to be the original meaning and intention of Sophocles has to be something that is shifting, roaming between the ancient and present human knowledge; and while distinctions such as historicity and significance may be absolutely relevant and necessary, one is still forced to accept that those distinctions become the attestations of metaphysics of presence, for they imply dual relationships and are the prioritised legs of a relationship as such. Regarding post-structuralist teachings, any master word, "value preference" or norm should then be taken as such.

Can anyone ideally distinguish, then, between an intended meaning and an intended significance when we return to Shakespeare's text? How can anyone simply dismiss the possibility that Shakespeare, like Sophocles, intentionally may have attributed this archetypal knowledge to his characters without having any access to modern psychoanalysis? It is neither possible to assume that Shakespeare did not know anything about the intuitive, subconscious drives of human beings, nor to assume that we are able to view Shakespeare's gift of foresight independently of today's modern scientific knowledge. The text called *Hamlet* certainly makes better sense when one gets acquainted with the psychoanalytic analyses of, say, Ernest Jones's *Hamlet and Oedipus*, or, Jacques Lacan's "Desire and Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*." If the textual language of Shakespeare is our major witness, then Ernest Jones' interpretation of *Hamlet* can be seen as one that problematizes Hirsch's categorisations of meaning and significance even when they are taken as a matter of ethical choice. One is to realize better that there is a very sensible and valid explanation of why Hamlet continually

defers action and postpones his revenge, when one becomes aware that Hamlet unconsciously identifies his own evil side with the murderous uncle, although his repressed evil finds expression mainly in terms of self-loathing and self-torture (Jones, “The Psycho-Analytical Solution” 59). He is frequently caught saying that he is “*very proud, ambitious, and revengeful, with more offences at his beck*” as he warns Ophelia: “*we are arrant knaves all, believe none of us*” (iii, i, 110-15). While Claudius is now in possession of the desired mother, he becomes the overpowering, succeeding rival (Jones, “The Psycho-Analytical Solution” 59). In addition, Lacan discusses in his article that by marrying Gertrude, Claudius becomes the symbolic-surrogate father of Hamlet; and, killing the major patriarch in the play would be substituted for parricide. Claudius is therefore the symbolic “Phallus” that cannot be really killed; an entity that is there and not there simultaneously. The uncle, by assuming and claiming the status of the “Phallus” (Lacan 50-2), becomes an illusion, a ghost, utterly absent, a “king of a thing,” “of nothing.” Consequently, the cryptic text of Shakespeare, as in Sophocles, stands out in its full manifestation of the fact that its author may have, after all, known a lot about our uncanny human repressions, and, intended to clearly convey such universally familiar experiences and archetypes.

Even when the interpretations of Jones and Lacan are allocated to the domain of significance, they will be subsumed under a binary model that will bear the token of a metaphysical opposition, a sort of demarcation whose linguistic and semantic implications will bar the possibility of contradiction and ambiguity to take place. The dual nature of distinctions such as meaning and significance, text and interpreter may impose them as classifications that strive to reach at genuine demarcations of language; however, it is no less true that they will epitomise the human quest for an origin—for an ontological priori that will come before all knowledge. Hirsch sees original meaning as a constant; he looks for a norm in interpretation, but deconstructive literary criticism resorts to no constants and norms that will go against the amorphous nature of its strategies. Likewise, while Gadamer claims in *Truth and Method* that “*writing detaches itself from the contingency of its origin and its author and makes itself free for new relationships*” (397), his proposition may be still challenged by the possibility of its not always being the case. Because although the “phallic” author’s hegemony can be put under erasure, the author is never presumably “dead.” Therefore, a similar linguistic and epistemological rupture seems to persist in the face of the essentialist idea that

writing may be conceived of as an entity that can spin free from its origin, author, and temporality.

In order to evade binary models in literary interpretation with the aim of practicing post-structuralist approaches, a strategy that functions like Derrida's *différance* may come to an aid. *Différance* is not a master word or a master signifier in Derrida's world; it is not a concept but rather a conceptuality. In deconstructionist thinking, *différance* may overtake the metaphysical implications of time, space, historicity and linearity. Space and time are divided only by *différance*; and *différance* means transcending the present, making everything temporal:

We shall see, later, in what respects this temporalizing is also a temporalization and spacing, is space's becoming-temporal and time's becoming-spatial, is 'primordial constitution' of space and time, as metaphysics or transcendental phenomenology would call it in the language that is here criticized and displaced. ("Différance" 136).

Derrida's key element, *différance*, is an icon of his own stance against metaphysics of presence. It is the condition for the possibility of *any* discourse, and "can no longer be understood according to the concept of 'sign,' which has always been taken to mean the representation of a presence" ("Différance" 138). It is the deferral and difference in meaning which is yet to come but which transcends all dualistic categorisations. And if we return to Shakespeare's text, *différance* will perhaps become the epitome of the Derridean axiom of meaning that is always elsewhere. In the words of Lee Edelman (165), "... in *Hamlet's world, in Elsinore, there's something else in 'or': a fetishization of difference to which the prince of puns is heir, a primal irrationality lodged at the origin of 'or,' something fully as unheimlich as Hamlet.*" Likewise, the uncanny connotations of the universal taboo in Jocasta's speech in Sophocles' play, the acknowledgment of the timelessness of the "fear of mother-marrying" in "many a man" should be taken as *différance*, a *play* [emphasis added] on linearity and temporality, of space becoming temporal and of time becoming spatial through the mirror of Derrida.

Thus Derrida may be seen as someone who contradicts the premises of both Gadamer and Hirsch because of their linguistic "emphases" on historicity. Without doubt, linearity also implies a form of idealism and Derrida wrote that he "*never believed in the absolute autonomy of a history as the history of philosophy*"

(“Positions” 50). That is why possibly Derrida employed a variety of terms in order to spin free from master words and metaphysical categorisations; apart from *différance*, he used signifiers such as *transcendental signifier/signified*, *trace*, *arche-writing*, *supplement*, *transcendental contraband*, *deconstructive jetty*, etc. And for this reason one may conclude that deconstructive criticism problematises and challenges Gadamer’s and Hirsch’s categorizations by way of their primary works.

Consequently, when literary criticism is reconsidered, anachronistic reading can be posed against the sovereignty of linearity and temporality. Meaning-formation and the language of interpretation should be allowed to be necessarily susceptible to contradiction, discordance or pluralism; however, such preference must not delineate total relativism or must not be set as a norm. A critic like Paul B. Armstrong, for example, warns against such dangers in literary criticism. According to Armstrong, “*we have legitimate disagreements about what literary works mean, but we are also able to say that some readings are wrong, not simply different*” (341). We also have “weak” and “strong” disagreements (344), but what we need is indeed a theory of the limits of pluralism. Armstrong highlights some major differences between Marxists, phenomenologists, structuralists, psychoanalysts, and subsequently refers to Hirsch is a kind of a monist while stating from the very beginning that “*the rigidity of the monists is as unacceptable ... as the nihilism of the radical relativists. Neither position can account for the paradox that characterizes the actual practice of our discipline*” (341). Therefore, Armstrong’s theory will seem to comply with the strategies of deconstructive criticism in a sense that such theory will enable us to decipher implications of duality, linearity and metaphysical presuppositions in general. It will perhaps cohere with strategies that render multiple interpretations of a text possible but do not set pluralism or undecidability as a kind of a norm.

Let us assume that one is to interpret *Hamlet* or *King Oedipus* with recourse to the teachings of the eighteenth century empiricism or nineteenth-century progressivism. Hirsch’s distinction between meaning and significance would have probably accomplished a perfectly convenient role because the intellectual grasp of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment allowed an emphasis on the supremacy of the rational mind, the Cartesian holistic self as the prevailing, privileged, true source for knowledge. With such an emphasis on linearity and linear thinking, the recourse to psychoanalytic interpretation may not have probably been considered valid and convincing enough. On the other hand, twentieth-century philosophy and

criticism were largely shaped and transformed by the more subversive teachings of Freud, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, and Foucault. The human mind, with its conscious and unconscious levels, is still so utterly beyond our control and understanding, and so deeply engraved in the irrational mechanisms of our universe and the mechanism that we call language. For this reason, idealist, absolutist and metaphysical presuppositions would fall short, and the ultimate logos that we call *truth* would be as ungraspable as it already is without recourse to those presuppositions.

Conclusion

The contemporary world presents itself as a continual challenge to conventional beliefs and pre-conditioned norms which nuclear families and social constructs tend to mould in every individual. Literary works, likewise, do not always offer easy conclusions, logical outcomes, linear plot progressions, well-developed fictional characters, reliable narrators, regular verses and metrical units that we tend to think of as conventional. Literature often betrays its own premises, and the rupture between what we call factual truth and symbolic truth becomes even more evident with the turn of the twentieth-century modernism, against the hegemony of long-embraced empirical, positivist and metaphysical presuppositions.

This analysis aimed to propose a strategy to approach and model the problem of anachronism in literary texts. It made references to some highlights from Gadamer and Hirsch in order to represent the contrast between more essentialist approaches to literature and post-structuralist criticism, manifested in the ideas of Barthes and Derrida. While Hirsch intended to reproduce or reconstruct the original context, the original author's intention, he advocated the idea that the interests and prejudices of the interpreters should be eliminated. Gadamer, on the other hand, believed that the past could be grasped only by its relation to the present, and this required to take into consideration the interests and prejudices of the interpreters/readers. Both critics emphasised the necessity for a norm, a unifying principle; they assumed that meanings and interpretations had to lead to an organic unity, as implied by the hermeneutical circle, which rested on a continual interaction between the parts and the whole, and vice versa. Hirsch prioritised the author's intention over contemporary prejudices and beliefs; thus he tried to create the ground for a stable and valid meaning in texts, to recreate the original meaning. Gadamer, on the other hand, tried to create his own epistemological centre under

the name of “tradition,” thus prioritising history in its relation to the human factor and making it indispensable to human understanding.

The hermeneutics of Gadamer and Hirsch constitute an example of how one might approach the concept of historicity in literary texts. Their teachings mark the beginning of the shift from author-centred to reader-oriented ethics of reading. Gadamer’s method represents the overpowering notion that the human subject cannot be wholly isolated from the impositions and prejudices of his own time, temporality and condition. Though it makes absolute sense when Gadamer claims that the past can be understood only by its relation to the present, and though his approach seems to be quite subversive and allows literary texts to be viewed more freely in an anachronistic light, he, nevertheless, employs the *present* as a master-word, a master-signifier, thus, establishing his own unifying principle. Therefore, to speak in deconstructive terms, his strategy dismantles a sort of essentialism that most structuralist theories tend to possess. Hirsch’s theory, to some extent, also seems to bear the imprints of dual relationships; however, at the same time it redeems itself because, as mentioned above, Hirsch claims that his approach does not manifest certain ideas due to a theoretical necessity, but more as an ethical choice, a value preference. This ethical choice forces one to agree that somehow Hirsch exceeds and transcends his own terms by retreating into the domain of preference. It may suffice to say that the relationship between meaning and significance is problematised, just like the relationship between the signifier and the signified in deconstructive terms. What Hirsch intends to suggest with the author’s intention and the interpreter’s meaning-construction may be indeed an epitome of the transitional status of literary theory that moves from Structuralism to post-Structuralism. It would not be probably inaccurate to say that the theories of Gadamer and Hirsch even accomplish a similar task—they become the demarcations of the fragile position of the subject in a post-Nietzschean, post-Darwinian world, of the disruption of the sense of time, linearity, and structure. They contribute to highlight the problem of relativism and temporality; as it stands out as clearly as the discursive differences in their narratives.

This study made use of two masterpieces—*Hamlet* and *Oedipus*—first, in order to achieve an easier access to the problem of anachronism and relativity; second, to benefit from the universality of these texts and familiarity with them. Due to the fact that these classical works of literature are among the most cited, discussed and referenced texts in literary history, there might be too little room yet to make a fresh

critique on them. However, post-structuralist criticism imposes its necessity in literary theory because the human urge for going back to the primeval search for origin, the quest for a unifying principle is still pretty much alive. If we pose the question “Is the author really dead, then?,” the answer would be “yes” and “no” simultaneously. The author is dead because the way we have always perceived the voice of authority and mastery is made unstable and the voice cannot be taken for granted against the backdrop of the violence of writing. The voice of the author is no longer the master signifier in a literary text but it is never fully absent; his presence is put under erasure, evacuated like the transcendental signified in Derrida, deferred like *meaning* itself, but always a ground for more *différance*. What we make out of a literary text is a complex interaction between multiple variables, all consciously and unconsciously inherent in the author’s, the reader’s, the society’s universal archetypal human knowledge. The individual text can never be thought of as an independent entity; though it may impose its reality and consciousness on the reader, as well as the author. The text is an epitome simultaneously of the author, of the author and the reader’s collective conscious and subconscious, of universal archetypes and symbols that can be continually traced independent of time and space. Therefore, the text is not only a constant play between the parts and the whole, but rather a constant play of signifiers, which return only to themselves, a process always on the move, a meaning-still-to-come, and never finalised. Like philosophy, literature is not mimetic; literary theory has not put a halt to its search, has not exhausted its arguments, and may be still looking for its lost traditions, for its epigenetic memory, but with the better wisdom it acquired with the guidance of its antecedents and predecessors of all times.

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