

Outlines of a Polonius Complex / *Esboços para um complexo de Polônio*

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on analyzing the discourse and the actions of the character Polonius in *The tragedy of Hamlet*, by William Shakespeare, in order to articulate Updike's vision of the counselor's personality in the novel *Gertrude and Claudius*. Based on this analysis, it aims to describe the traits of the character that may contribute to a discussion about contemporary behavior.

KEYWORDS: Polonius Complex; Postmodern Identity; Shakespeare; Updike

RESUMO

O artigo centra-se na análise do discurso e da ação da personagem Polônio, em *Hamlet*, de William Shakespeare, a fim de articular a updikiana visão da personalidade do conselheiro no romance *Gertrudes e Cláudio* e, a partir daí, descrever as características da personagem que podem servir para uma discussão sobre o comportamento contemporâneo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Complexo de Polônio; Identidade pós-moderna; Shakespeare; Updike

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Introduction

By adopting the ancient Aristotelian orientation about the study of the nature of dramatic characters in the *Poetics*¹ (the analysis of speeches and actions), it becomes immediately possible to describe Polonius in *The tragedy of Hamlet*: he is an individual whose obsession with speech is a way to compensate his extremely reduced power of action in the dramatic text. Under this initial perspective, it is interesting to note Polonius's possible approximations and distances to the very well known problem of the lack of action noticed in the Prince of Denmark, or, according to Frye (1986),² stated in the constitution of the characters of the play as a whole.

In Polonius, speech becomes an equivalent of (or a substitute for) the action. Throughout the entire play by Shakespeare, he has 86 speeches that anticipate 89 actions that can be classified in 17 different types: asking for something, advising, having somebody do something, probing, warning, instructing, greeting, explaining something to himself/herself, informing, adorning the speech, recommending, confirming, introducing, praising somebody for something, criticizing, inquiring with no intention to probe, and persuading (please see Appendix). Through these effects of speech, it is possible to check both the strategies used to dissimulate Polonius's real intentions and his acknowledgement that, if conveniently operated, he can benefit from the theatrical manipulation of the world. In this sense, the construction of Polonius's personality is centered in the study of how to predict and control social scenes and in the suppression of the inopportune *pathos* that desires to control the facts around him.

Nonetheless, the development of the understanding of the world as a predictable theater that can be maneuvered is part of the mystery that composes such a tragic character. That happens because there are few moments in Shakespeare's play that insinuate how this interpretation was developed in Polonius's personality – and it is in this gap that John Updike, in his novel *Gertrude and Claudius*, creates, reinforces, or rereads Polonius's past experiences. In Shakespeare, however, what becomes evident is that this interpretation feeds discourse as the substitute for actions. Such understanding of the world transforms the counselor from a cruel person into a victim of Hamlet's

¹ ARISTOTLE. *Poetics*. Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing; R. Pullins Company, 2006.

² FRYE, N. *On Shakespeare*. Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press, 1986.

performative and irregular theatricality – derived, in part, from the irony of Yorick, the clown.³

It is in the challenge between the being of language (Polonius), who recognizes the use of theatricality as a means to build a convenient, opportune and mobile truth, and the being of essentiality (Hamlet), who uses theatricality to investigate a deep or predicted truth that gives meaning to his existence or justifies his inertia, that Shakespeare decrees the tragic end of these two dramatic characters. Polonius's last line – “O, I am slain!” (SHAKESPEARE, 1996b, p.86; Act 3, Scene 4) –, riddled with the representation of dying within the dimension of theatrical speech, occurs amid the bad fortune of the character through the unforeseen circumstances of human actions. Hamlet's last line – “The rest is silence” (SHAKESPEARE, 1996b, p.140. Act 5 / Scene 2) – confirms that the act of dying, still marked by the theater of the world, or *theatrum mundi*, and the necessary posthumous narration for the character do not provide the encounter with profound wisdom devised in the scene of death.

John Updike's novel *Gertrude and Claudius* establishes the construction of Polonius's character with the reading of three texts: *History of the Danes*, by Saxo Grammaticus, in which the name of the royal counselor is Corambus; *Histoires Tragiques*, by François Belleforest, in which his name is Corambis; and in Shakespeare's own dramatic text, *The tragedy of Hamlet*. By doing so, Updike's text enunciates a way of study that tries to benefit not only from the previous information that Shakespeare may have used in the preparation of the character Polonius, but also from the mechanisms of re-creation used by the Elizabethan author to produce his dramatic text. It is important to consider that Updike presents his analysis on Polonius's character based on his own creative process. Shakespeare had already done it when he created *The tragedy of Hamlet* by considering previous narratives. Therefore, at the same time Updike updates the characters, he carries out his task of constructing them as

³ Prince Hamlet's resemblance to Yorick (the improviser of jokes) in his childhood is present in Act 5, Scene 1 of the Shakespearean text: “Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio: a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy: he hath borne me on his back a thousand times; and now, how abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge rims at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now? Your gambols? Your songs? Your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now, to mock your own grinning? Quite chap-fallen?” (SHAKESPEARE, 1996b, p.123). Updike explores even more the interference of such resemblance to Yorick as a determinant of Hamlet's character: “Only the disreputable, possibly demented jester, Yorick, seemed to win his approval: young Amleth loved a joke, to the point of finding the entire world, as it was composed within Elsinore, a joke” (UPDIKE, 2012, p.41).

a necessity to reinforce Saxo Grammaticus's, Belleforest's, and Shakespeare's creative memories – already impregnated with anonymous oral tradition.

1 The Mapping of the Polonius Complex

In Shakespeare's dramatic text, the character Polonius is constituted around certain paradoxes. First, his character is elusive, fickle and disguised so that it suits the laws of social convenience and royal authority – his behaviour varies according to the rules that give stability to the social theater. Second, although Polonius's personality is fit to variability so that the participation and control of social scenes occur, his understanding that human actions can be totally adjusted and predictable makes him less attentive to the performatic and circumstantial development of other characters. Third, based on his study of human nature, he tries to deduce the actions of the other characters in a universal way, but his fickle way of operating with the theater of the world is incompatible with the support of any truth related to man. To sum up, Shakespeare's royal counselor Polonius tries to invalidate the contradiction that constitutes him as a character.

In view of such paradoxes that constitute Polonius in *The tragedy of Hamlet* and in Updike's novel *Gertrude and Claudius*, this article proposes an analysis based on the following questions: a) How does Updike's novel re-create Polonius's personality in view of the play of contradictions that Shakespeare created?; b) What is the importance of the counselor's discourse in *Gertrude and Claudius* to the critical readings about Shakespeare's works?; and c) How can Updike's reconstruction of the character Polonius be understood as a creative-conceptual update of our historical moment?

As to the first question, we asked: a) How does Updike's novel re-create Polonius's personality in view of the play of contradictions that Shakespeare created? In relation to the fickle character of the counselor, in order to analyze and preserve the stability of social theater, it is possible to affirm that, in Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, the clear difference between the kind of treatment Polonius gives to those who have a social position that is less prestigious than his own and to those who are nuclear in royalty immediately indicates the conservative attitude of the counselor. He wants to preserve such social spaces untouched while he approaches the center of command.

On the one hand, Polonius establishes a regular dialogue with those whom he considers inferior so that he can demonstrate the fixed quality of his hierarchical position. It may be noted in the order given to Ophelia at the end of Act one, Scene three:

From this time be somewhat scanter of your maiden presence; set your entreatments at a higher rate than a command to parley. For Lord Hamlet, believe so much in him, that he is young and with a larger tether may he walk than may be given you: in few, Ophelia, do not believe his vows; for they are brokers, not of that dye which their investments show, but mere implorators of unholy suits, breathing like sanctified and pious bawds, the better to beguile. This is for all: I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth, have you so slander any moment leisure, as to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet. Look to't, I charge you: come your ways (SHAKESPEARE, 1996b, p.24; Act 1, Scene 3).

On the other hand, by means of flattery he dynamizes his character or his understanding of the facts in order to fulfill the requests from royal people and acquire prestige within royalty. In the dialogue between Hamlet and Polonius it is possible to note that the prince makes fun of the royal counselor's behavior:

HAMLET: Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel? / LORD POLONIUS: By the mass, and 'tis like a camel, indeed. / HAMLET: Methinks it is like a weasel. / LORD POLONIUS: It is backed like a weasel. / HAMLET: Or like a whale? / LORD POLONIUS: Very like a whale (SHAKESPEARE, 1996b, pp.80-81; Act 3, Scene 2).

In *Gertrude and Claudius*, Updike enhances the desire Polonius has to increasingly be in the center of the court's decisions, being invested in royal authority. Therefore, the writer confirms that the counselor is pleased with his command stability and with the chance to take root and remain in this royal hierarchical order. In the middle of the dialogue that the counselor has with the queen it is possible to verify that, as Polonius was closer to the royal family, he negotiates his future position:

He slumped back into the ill-fitting chair. "Even advisers cannot always be slaves to good advice. 'Neither a borrower nor a lender be,' it is said, yet life is a tangle of payments and defaults; it ensnares us all into debt. I suspect that our king would like to see me dismissed, which renders my risk either greater or less than otherwise—quite

which, I cannot judge. But I think my stake, measured in years of royal favor remaining, is small and dwindling.” / “You are the father of a future queen,” Geruthe assured him. “As such, you are scarcely dismissable.” / “Ah, don’t push that chance too hard, milady. Ophelia is still a child; she is apt to yield what cannot be recovered, getting nothing for it but contempt. Hamlet is arrogant, and walks on a longer tether than she, and enjoys using the full length of it. I fear he does not value my angel as do you and I” (UPDIKE, 2012, p.108).

Moreover, the Updike’s text adds a different dynamics of flattery when the counselor himself inverts the logic of granting favors. He does it in relation to the queen when he hides her relationship with Claudius, and in relation to her lover when he becomes an accomplice in the assassination of Hamlet, the previous king. This is the most well structured aspect Updike’s novel has in relation to Polonius.

In Shakespeare’s tragedy, as the counselor heedlessly admits the changeable and accidental nature of the personality of the other, Polonius’s behavioral mechanism also suffers unforeseen setbacks when he comes across Prince Hamlet’s speeches. The fact that Hamlet is contaminated with melancholy and that he simultaneously simulates madness potentializes his contempt for the play of convenience and curtsies. This situation dismantles any precedent speculation about the scenes of social life that Polonius performs in order to become closer to the spheres of power. As a matter of fact, the counselor’s flattery to Prince Hamlet, who is of greater hierarchy, is unmasked by the instability and temporariness of Hamlet’s enunciations. Besides, Polonius’s attempts to investigate the reason for Hamlet’s depressive behavior are rejected by the satirical unpredictability of the replies given by the prince.

LORD POLONIUS: Do you know me, my lord? / HAMLET: Excellent well; you are a fishmonger. / LORD POLONIUS: Not I, my lord. / HAMLET: Then I would you were so honest a man. / LORD POLONIUS: Honest, my lord! / HAMLET: Ay, sir; to be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand. / LORD POLONIUS: That's very true, my lord. / HAMLET: For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a god kissing carrion - have you a daughter? / LORD POLONIUS: I have, my lord. / HAMLET: Let her not walk i' the sun: conception is a blessing: but not as your daughter may conceive. Friend, look to 't (SHAKESPEARE, 1996b, p.46; Act 2, Scene 2).

In *Gertrude and Claudius*, by not adopting the temperament of a talkative Polonius, deprived of a sophisticated psychological profile, Updike expands the

complexity of the analysis of this character in relation to Hamlet when he exposes the knowledge that the counselor has about the Prince's childhood and the consequences this knowledge presents to the royal family. In Updike's work, Polonius becomes an informer of a deep part of Hamlet's character – a part that is reticent in Shakespeare's work. That is portrayed in Polonius' speech, when he talks with Queen Gertrude about Hamlet's character:

Amleth at thirteen is formed for good or ill. The quirks that disturb you I would lay to his predilection for the actor's trade. He must try on many attitudes in rapid succession. To be sincere, then insincere, and then sincere in his insincerity—such shifts fascinate him. How marvellous, to his student mind, is this human capacity to be many things, to take many roles, to enlarge one's preening, paltry identity with many half-considered feints and deceptions [...] Your husband sets the boy, it may be, too stern an example (UPDIKE, 2012, pp.48-49).

According to John Updike's reconstruction, the flaw of Polonius's analysis of Hamlet does not merely occur because it is exclusively based on the counselor's own past youth, considered as exemplary. Such flaw is far beyond the fact that it derives from the counselor's assessment of the *pathos*, supported in a generalizing conception of human behavior. It also comes from a confidence in the explanation of individual actions. It occurs by means of the study of a specific part of the past experiences of the observed subject, which stabilizes attitude models, such as childhood or the first emotional relationships.

Regarding the deduction of universalized forms of human behavior that, according to Polonius, stimulate the balance and dignity of the spirit, such as the elimination of the *pathos* advised to Ophelia, it is possible to presume that not only in Shakespeare but also in Updike's rereading such formulas maintain rules that preserve the status and the moral image of the man with a higher social hierarchy. Such defense of behavior is one more effort to stabilize the values that characterize an ideal that is mirrored by royal centers. If, on the one hand, the counselor's role performed by Polonius precisely serves to maintain royal power as an exemplary emanation for the vassals, on the other hand, in *Gertrude and Claudius*, this character uses the prediction and the study of these scenes to improvise, in the opportunities observed in the theater

of the world, his gradual and consistent entrance to the possibilities of decision and control that are inherent in royal authority.

As for the second question, we asked: b) What is the importance of the counselor's discourse in *Gertrude and Claudius* to the critical readings about Shakespeare's works?

Besides the texts that directly refer to the construction of the counselor in Updike's novel and that most probably influenced the construction of the Shakespearean Polonius in some way, such as the ones by Saxo Grammaticus and François Belleforest, it is possible to affirm that the accumulation of criticism and transpositions to other medias, especially the extensive filmography about *Hamlet*, establishes a dialogue within the personality of the Polonius that Updike developed. All the criticism by Freud (1938),⁴ Jones (1976),⁵ Lacan (1958 – 1959)⁶ and Benjamin (2009)⁷ (referred here as appropriate illustrations) stimulate the expansion of the psychological complexity of the character Polonius in relation to Prince Hamlet. Similarly, homonymous films, such as the ones by Zeffirelli (1990),⁸ Branagh (1996)⁹ and Olivier (1948),¹⁰ suggest a set of filters to the formulation of the counselor's traits. In this sense, Updike's discussion about Polonius many times re-presents and synthesizes these critical studies and aesthetic transpositions reformulated in the very novel.

As for the third question, we asked: c) How can Updike's reconstruction of the character Polonius be understood as a creative-conceptual update of our historical moment?

⁴ FREUD, S. *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*. New York: Random House, 1938, pp.181-549.

⁵ JONES, E. *Hamlet and Oedipus*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1976.

⁶ LACAN, J. *The seminar of Jacques Lacan, book VI: Desire and its interpretation, 1958 – 1959*, pp.161-248. Available at <<http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Book-06-Desire-and-its-interpretation.pdf>>. Accessed on October, 4, 2015.

⁷ BENJAMIN, W. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. New York: Verso, 2009.

⁸ HAMLET. Director: Franco Zeffirelli. Actors: Mel Gibson, Glenn Close, Alain Sir Bates, others. Script: Christopher De Vore and Franco Zeffirelli. United States of America, 1990. 1 DVD (130 min), widescreen, color. Based on William Shakespeare's play.

⁹ HAMLET. Director: Kenneth Branagh. Actors: Kenneth Branagh, Kate Winslet, Richard Briers, others. United States of America, 1996. 1 DVD (235 min), widescreen, color. Based on William Shakespeare's play.

¹⁰ HAMLET. Director: Laurence Olivier. Actors: Laurence Olivier, Eileen Herlie, Basil Sydney, Norman Wooland, others. Script: Laurence Olivier. United Kingdom, 1948. 1 DVD (155 min), black and white. Based on William Shakespeare's play.

The choice that Polonius made for the mobility of character in order to serve his own interests and to compose identities that may favor a proximity with the values that are reflected by royal authority implicates that the foci of disputes of socio-cultural representativity are private (they are not centered in universalized wills), punctual (they vary according to circumstances), and negotiable (they are mobile within the articulations of power). It is in the field of indefiniteness and flexibility that the counselor recognizes his possibility for staging in a political terrain to talk about identities associated to the desired authority. The particularism of wishes, the metamorphosis of interests amid the contingencies of power and the negotiation handled as the reformulation of representativity seem to derive from the current description of the postmodern subject.

Nevertheless, it is important to observe that, while part of the theoreticians of postmodernity, such as Hall (2001;¹¹ 1992),¹² invest in these characteristics as a capacity to confront and clarify the socio-cultural tensions by means of the occupation of significant spaces of power representation, Polonius's case contradicts such project when using the same instruments to confirm the stability of authority. As the counselor adopts the main actions to dissuade the tensions next to the center of royal power, he assumes the dark side of the postmodern subject¹³ that, instead of providing the confrontation or the occupation of representational areas, emphasizes the nature of integration that is part of his political project and confirms the links already established by social hierarchy. In Updike's novel, this changes a little, because the counselor is able to orchestrate the assassination of the royal authority (Hamlet-father) by using specific stratagems. However, he does it simply to preserve his social position and to acquire more prestige in his role as a counselor for the new king. In this case, the abrogation of a king and his replacement by another do not question the royal system of favors; on the contrary, it depersonalizes the center that dictates hierarchies by maintaining the logic of power division and social exploitation.

¹¹ HALL, S. *The Multi-Cultural Question*. Milton Keynes, England: Pavis Centre for Social and Cultural Research, 2001.

¹² HALL, S. The Question of Cultural Identity. In: HALL, S.; HELD, D.; MCGREW, T. (Ed.). *Modernity and its Futures*. Padstow, England: The Open University, 1992, pp.273-326.

¹³ Here are some characteristics of the postmodern subject that we have highlighted: a not centered, performative subject, with negotiable, multiple and transitory identities (HALL, 1992; for reference, see footnote 13); a subject that emerges from the decline of metanarratives and from the degradation of convictions in the political discourses with wide social or epistemological applicability (LYOTARD, 1984) [LYOTARD, J. *The Postmodern Condition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984].

2 Studies about Polonius's Discourse

Although Polonius is not the main focus of discussion when *Hamlet* is analyzed, this counselor was subject to different understandings in the critical fortune of Shakespeare's dramatic text. In this sense, a considerable part of the investigations that describe the behavior of the royal counselor may work as clues to the discussion about the very profile of this character, his being updated in Updike's novel, and the relevance of analyzing Polonius's characteristics nowadays.

From Amora's (2006, p.59) perspective, the counselor does not show that he is able to play the role to which he was appointed. More than this, the scholar defines Polonius's character as clumsy and unpleasant, as the nosy informer of the king (2006, p.280). Furthermore, Amora (2006, p.281) interprets Polonius's death as a result of his own fault, as a consequence of his intriguing impulse and reckless habit of interfering in other people's matters.

Contrary to this perspective is what Vygotsky (1971)¹⁴ thinks about the issue. For him, the fatal scene that involves the murder of the counselor by the main character is a result of Polonius's victimization as he enters the enchanted atmosphere of the tragedy, which is already contaminated with the darkness of Hamlet's state of mind and the royal crime. By attempting to mediate the dispute between two strong men – the king, who was marked by sin, and the prince, who was marked by suffering –, the inevitable catastrophe reaches everyone who surrounds them. In this case, since he has to perform his role as a counselor and as a representative of royal interests, Polonius cannot escape from tragedy. He is reached by it (VYGOTSKY, 1971).¹⁵

In fact, underestimating Polonius's skills in the dramatic text does not seem to be an unusual interpretation. Harold Bloom, one of the most publicized Shakespearean scholars, in a very blunt essay entitled *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited* (2003),¹⁶ forgets so much about the peculiarities that compose Polonius's profile that this character is compared to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two very peripheral characters in the drama.

¹⁴ VYGOTSKY, L. *The Psychology of Art*. Cambridge, MA: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1971.

¹⁵ For reference, see footnote 14.

¹⁶ BLOOM, H. *Hamlet: Poem Unlimited*. Edinburgh, Scotland: Canongate Books, 2003.

In this comparison, Bloom (2003)¹⁷ affirms that the satellite condition of these three characters allow for the development of the witty or critical tone of Prince Hamlet.

Although Amora has caricatured Polonius, some passages in which this scholar illustrates the speeches of the counselor present counter-affirmatives to the jocular behavior that he tries to describe. As an example, Amora (2006, p.280) comments on the overly formal tone he used with the royalty at the moment he asks for permission for his son to depart to France. As he puts it, Polonius uses an excess of words that could be summarized in a single yes or no.

KING CLAUDIUS: Have you your father's leave? What says Polonius? / LORD POLONIUS: He hath, my lord, wrung from me my slow leave by laboursome petition, and at last Upon his will I seal'd my hard consent: I do beseech you, give him leave to go (SHAKESPEARE, 1996b, p.13; Act 1, Scene 2)

Nevertheless, that is where the belief of the character in the treatment of discourse lies: as a characteristic of a good political servant, the counselor executes the adorned and formal use of language as a possibility to affirm himself as an intellectual force beside the king. Besides that, it is the same Amora (2006, p.69; p.80) that brings back the idea that Polonius is the one who advises his daughter to pretend when she meets with Hamlet so that the kings can observe the prince. Also, Amora mentions that it is Polonius himself that determines the suspension of the simulation planned by Hamlet when he verifies the king's situation. If, in a first moment, Polonius starts a process of theatricalization of human actions so that he can acquire pertinent knowledge from it, in a posterior moment he has an idea of when the simulation must end so that the impertinence of knowledge does not show. In this case, to label Polonius's character as intriguing, reckless, disgusting or exaggerated restrains the complexity that constitutes such a character.

Still on his intriguing traits, it is possible to argue about the ambiguity of Polonius's profile when considering the theoretical model that Walter Benjamin (2009)¹⁸ proposed to Baroque drama. According to Benjamin, the counselor, as an intriguing type, has the anthropological knowledge that allows him to know human

¹⁷ For reference, see footnote 16.

¹⁸ For reference, see footnote 7.

passions. This is where his skills to manipulate men like pawns in chess come from. On the other hand, this same knowledge is bitter because, when he learns how these passions work, he himself chooses to live without them, without letting his emotional vulnerability be incited. According to Benjamin, such knowledge allows for the image of the counselor to be conveyed in two ways: he either behaves as a saint and defends royal authority, removing internal and external threats to the kingdom, or wears the sign of betrayal and taints royal authority. The first helps combat catastrophe; the second allows and strengthens catastrophe itself.

In the dramatic text, although the structure of the Baroque drama can be evoked to explicit the functions and determinations of many characters of Shakespeare's tragedies, *Hamlet's* condition as an Elizabethan theater and all its specificities makes the relation between and the behavior of such characters even more complex. Polonius, for example, even being faithful to the current king, takes on the condition of traitor because Claudius had already committed regicide and fratricide. Therefore, the counselor replicates the sin and the stain in the kingdom, even meeting royal interests. On the other hand, the ambiguity of character spreads in Polonius because Shakespeare does not make clear that the counselor is aware of the crimes committed by the current king – and that enhances a very large polysemy as to the possibilities of building this character for stage performance.

As to Updike's novel, the ambiguity that arises from the conscience of the assassination of Claudius is erased, and Polonius's condition of a traitor is confirmed because the novelist clarifies that he is one of the main articulators of the event of the crime. In this sense, Polonius's profile becomes even more sagacious, for he creates opportunities for peremptory alliances or still manipulates the wills of his own regents Claudius and Gertrude, who are consumed by amorous passion. Updike's interpretation of the counselor ends up being, in fact, a complete update of the concept of power according to Foucault's perspective.¹⁹ Based on the performance of the character in the novel, the notion of power no longer has a merely oppressive nature, neither is it still

¹⁹ According to Foucault (1980, p.198), “[p]ower in the substantive sense, ‘le’ *pouvoir*, doesn’t exist... The idea that there is either located at – or emanating from – a given point something which is a ‘power’ seems to me to be based on a misguided analysis [...] In reality power means relations, a more-or-less organized, hierarchical, co-ordinated cluster of relations” [FOUCAULT, M. *The Confession of the Flesh*. In: GORDON, C. (Ed.). *Power / Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. London: Harvester, 1980].

fixed in the exploratory duality. Instead of merely reproducing the relations of domination, it moves them, displacing them and allowing the displacement of those that integrate it. Apparently in this novel, Polonius reinforces the concept that not only does power make floating and unstable identities possible in hierarchical spaces, but it also allows the understanding that the foci of social dispute are particular, specific and negotiable scenarios.

If Updike, when rereading the character Polonius in his fictional work, highlights the profile of the royal counselor, the same happens with the critiques made by Northrop Frye (1986),²⁰ and mostly by Ernest Jones (1976).²¹ According to Frye's (1986)²² understanding, Polonius emerges as a metonym of Hamlet's father. In other words, similar to the previous king, he was murdered and his death incites his son Laertes to revenge his death – a revenge circle. Therefore, the correspondence of the victimized Hamlet-father with Polonius reverberates to others, such as the correspondence of murderers Claudius / Hamlet, and the correspondence of vigilantes Hamlet / Laertes. With the overlap of both circles of murders, Shakespeare reinforced the origin of Hamlet's tale that came from other versions as revenge plots (HELIODORA, 2004; KERMODE, 2001).²³ However, the evolution of this Elizabethan tragedy goes far beyond justice and honor stories within private spheres. Besides that, the equivalences between characters suggested by the correspondences that came from the revenge circles make the roles of the characters even more complex. For instance, Polonius's image works within a circle of revenge in a certain way and within another circle in a completely opposite way.

For Ernest Jones, the character Polonius must be understood by means of the process of decomposition of the paternal archetype done by Prince Hamlet. Jones's (1976)²⁴ defense comes from the finding of the contrasting duality that is manifest to the son when he is in the presence of his father: a) reverent love for and respect to memory and b) aversion to the loss of vivacity and rebellion against control. According to the Jones, what happened in the case of the Prince of Denmark was a dissociation of the father in the specter of the king (mirror of reverence) and of Claudius and Polonius

²⁰ For reference, see footnote 2.

²¹ For reference, see footnote 5.

²² For reference, see footnote 2.

²³ KERMODE, F. *Shakespeare's Language*. London: Penguin, 2001.

²⁴ For reference, please see footnote 5.

(hostility inciters). Therefore, as a decomposed and surrogate father the royal counselor reflects resentment to Hamlet: Polonius's senile behavior, the picture of a degraded nature, irritates the prince and his youth. In a different way, Polonius personifies another attribute that attracts the affiliate contrast in relation to the father: that of repressor of the raptures of youth. Ernest Jones (1976)²⁵ clarifies that the implacable guard over the daughter Ophelia prevents Hamlet, in his hormonal potency, from any youth clamor for sexual manifestation.

The theme of the excessive control that Polonius has over his daughter is discussed by Frye (1986).²⁶ He finds that Queen Gertrude's first speech in Act 5 Scene 1 destroys all the royal counselor's arguments about the hierarchical distance between Hamlet and Ophelia: "I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife; I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid, And not have strew'd thy grave" (SHAKESPEARE, 1996b, p.125; Act 5, Scene 1). Frye's explanation suggests that Polonius would be rationalizing Ophelia's possession and that, just as any Shakespearean father that has adult daughters, he would only free her when it pleased him. For Vygotsky (1971),²⁷ the fear Polonius has of Hamlet's love for his daughter derives from the fact that the counselor, even intuitively, notes the apparently mark of mourning pain from a world that does not allow the love of a woman and that pulses for tragedy, destruction, and the inevitable catastrophe.

Jones (1976)²⁸ proposes the hypothesis that Polonius is affected by the Griselda Complex, or, according to the psychoanalyst, a late development of his own original Oedipus Complex toward his mother. In this sense, the Griselda Complex reflects the desire to possess the sexual organs of his daughter Ophelia (as a projection of his mother) while holding down and fighting against rivals (as attempts to parental claims). If, in the process of decomposition of the father figure by Hamlet, the prince sees Polonius as a decoupled and surrogate father, in the case of Polonius, Jones's interpretation that the Griselda Complex is an unfolding of the Oedipus Complex allows for the inversion in which Hamlet is considered an attempt of a surrogate father that

²⁵ For reference, see footnote 5.

²⁶ For reference, see footnote 2.

²⁷ For reference, see footnote 14.

²⁸ For reference, see footnote 5.

questions the counselor's paternal function and that, at the same time, prevents the childish desire to possess the mother represented by the daughter.

In *Gertrude and Claudius*, Updike (2012, pp.50-51) values Jones's interpretation when he reinforces the aspect that Polonius's former wife, Magrit de Møn, was overly young and died because of the intense lust of her husband. In the same way, the Griselda Complex is strengthened by the indication of the deep affection Polonius has towards Queen Gertrude – an affection that lasted a long time, ever since she was a child (UPDIKE, 2012, pp.106-107). Certainly, in the figure of a very young wife or in the memory of the affection for the queen since she was a young lady, the royal counselor preserves the image of the daughter and the desire to possess her sexuality.

Polonius's complexity, however, does not only derive from the criticism about his profile, but also from the function he represents: that of advising. For Octávio Paz (1973),²⁹ the purpose of the practice of political counseling – as well as magic, its predecessor – is the cult of power. Both share the recipe of tyranny and of the domination of men. In both cases, because of the intention to understand domination for the sake of domination, the consequence is the awareness of one's own loneliness. Such perception of being alone can only be related to the bitter wisdom that Walter Benjamin affirms the counselor has, preventing him from feeling and sharing the secret of passion, which he has come to know.

Paradoxically, Benjamin himself (1969),³⁰ in a text entitled *The Storyteller*, offers a concept about the act of advising, which proclaims the power to congregate community experience with the stories told by oral tradition. In this sense, advice strengthens the knowledge of a community as a suggestion for the continuation of a story; thus, it values exemplary morals that come from the ancestors. Opposed to Paz's argument or to the investigation about Baroque drama by the same Benjamin, at this moment, when the philosopher discusses loneliness and segregation, he does not find its reflex in advice, but in the consolidation of the narrative form of the novel as a correspondent of the man who has lost the connection with community experience and who individualizes himself, not having the ability to give advice or listen to it.

²⁹ PAZ, O. *The Bow and the Lyre*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1973.

³⁰ BENJAMIN, W. *The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nicolai Leskov*. In: _____. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. New York: Schocken Books, 1969, pp.83-110.

When analyzing the proliferation of the consumption of advice in contemporaneity, the scholar Zygmunt Bauman (2000)³¹ notices practices that help socialization and reinforce current individuality at the same time. In order to do that, Bauman initially clarifies the modern confusion between the concepts of leader and counselor. He explains that the first one incites and demands discipline and performs as intermediates between individual and public goods. Counselors, on the other hand, can only wait from their listeners to be attentive and to discuss the politics of the domestic sphere, reinforcing the orientation of private environment as a mechanism of broad social effectiveness. In the case of the Shakespearean Polonius, it is not difficult to verify how much his advice is tied solely to the circumstances of the private life of royalty. As to the reinforcement of such attitude in Updike's novel, it is necessary to increasingly understand the focus on the counselor as a relevant update for readers, who, if understood as an example of the contemporary consumer (BAUMAN, 2000),³² are eager for advice. Both the multiplication and banality of advice and the relevance and seduction of the counselor role in current society, far from reflecting an exemplary duty, come associated to the addiction of private environment to a narcissistic worship that is never satisfied.

In Gilles Lipovetsky's (1999)³³ studies about the current post-moralist society, it is possible to observe the reflection of Polonius's behavior. Advice does not inspire a positive duty, with the obligation of an exemplary task. Instead, when it is given with some disciplinary effect, it tends to alert to risks or prohibit actions. On the other hand, ideal advice is underestimated and discredited. Because it is understood as a language artifice, it feeds the appeal for the spectacle, for performance, for farce. In Act 1, Scene 3, Shakespeare's Polonius's speeches display an inability to indicate a duty or to reinforce an exemplary practice even to his son Laertes, amid so many contradictions of social theatricalization:

Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar. Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried, grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel; but do not dull thy palm with entertainment of each new-hatch'd, unfledged comrade. Beware of entrance to a quarrel, but being in, bear't that the opposed may beware of thee. Give every man thy ear,

³¹ BAUMAN, Z. *Liquid Modernity*. Oxford: Polity Press, 2000.

³² For reference, see footnote 31.

³³ LIPOVETSKY, G. *The Twilight of Duty*. Praha: Prostor, 1999.

but few thy voice; take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment. Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy, but not express'd in fancy; rich, not gaudy; for the apparel oft proclaims the man, and they in France of the best rank and station are of a most select and generous chief in that. Neither a borrower nor a lender be; for loan oft loses both itself and friend, and borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry. This above all: to thine ownself be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man. Farewell: my blessing season this in thee! (SHAKESPEARE, 1996b, p.22; Act 1, Scene 3).

Nevertheless, he indicates a non-duty to his daughter Ophelia and places himself against a will with another stronger will.³⁴

As to Updike's Polonius, when he plots against Hamlet-father, it is clear that the counselor is seduced by the crafty strategies that involve treacheries and machinations in the backstage. Immersed in his pleasure to set traps, Polonius despises any exemplary models and risks not only his life but also the destiny of the kingdom: "Even on the brink of his own quartering he relished a plot to which he was privy" (UPDIKE, 2012, p.161).

Final Remarks: The Importance of the Instrumentalization of the Polonius Complex

Undeniably, when evaluating the contexts of production of the character, it has been (and it still is) urgent to trace the profile of Prince Hamlet many times in order for the psychic (FREUD, 1938;³⁵ JONES, 1976;³⁶ LACAN, 1958-1959)³⁷ or cultural (BLOOM, 2003;³⁸ VYGOTSKY, 1971;³⁹ HELIODORA, 2004) mechanisms of the societies that reread it to be commented on. The question raised about the royal counselor was allowed because of the urgency to analyze such character in the scope of identity description as a mobile and performatic celebration within the current postmodern context, as it is observed by Hall (1992).⁴⁰ It is important to note how the realization of Polonius' personality in the Shakespearean dramatic text *The tragedy of*

³⁴ See the citation from Act 1, Scene 3 (SHAKESPEARE, 1996b, p.24) in section The Mapping of the Polonius Complex.

³⁵ For reference, please see footnote 4.

³⁶ For reference, please see footnote 5.

³⁷ For reference, please see footnote 6.

³⁸ For reference, please see footnote 16.

³⁹ For reference, please see footnote 14.

⁴⁰ For reference, please see footnote 12.

Hamlet or in the Updikian novel *Gertrude and Claudius* points not only to the attributes that may be associated to a profile that has been considered in contemporaneity as the post-modern subject, but also its possible changeable destinies and motivations within the political scene of the speech and the dramatized rereadings in the world, where the fluctuation of roles and the flexibilization of enunciations are demanded.

For instance, in Act 1, Scene 2, when Polonius recommends the adequate manners to his son Laertes during his travel to France, the father presents a series of conducts that are opposite to each other and that vary according to the circumstances and agents who are going to relate to his son in the distant land.⁴¹ In the middle of the farce of customs and bows in society, Shakespeare's irony is complete when he places, at the end of Polonius's speech, the biggest contradiction that composes an identity, which can only be translated by the look of the other and by the pretense of an adequate behavior to the same look: "This above all: to thine ownself be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man" (SHAKESPEARE, 1996b, p.22; Act 1, Scene 3). In *Gertrude and Claudius*, Updike even clarifies the profile of the royal counselor as floating and dependent on someone else's mirror. The author makes Polonius comment to Queen Gertrude on the formation of individual identities in the inevitable transitivity of look and the impossibility to think the individual as a free nuclear structure: "But, beloved Geruthe, how do any of us define ourselves but in relation to others? There is no unattached free-floating self" (UPDIKE, 2012, p.101).

The importance of establishing a dialogue between the Shakespearean Polonius and Updike's rereading of this character centers in the possibility to study the enunciation of the processes of identitary shifts (a characteristic of contemporaneity) in distinct contexts of production or criticism. If, through the crossing of different conceptions of time, it has already been possible to think about Prince Hamlet as an instrument of presentation and development of modern thinking (MITOS, 2005) – although the prince's and Shakespeare's contexts were not of modernity consolidation – it is very likely that the same can be done with Polonius in relation to the understanding of postmodern identity: not unitary, polysemic, multiple, changing, and contradictory. In this sense, the discussion about the building of the royal counselor character is an opportunity to study the possibilities of deepening and even questioning the study of

⁴¹ See the citation from Act 1, Scene 3 (SHAKESPEARE, 1996b, p.22) in section Studies about Polonius's Discourse.

identities in contemporaneity. Considering that there is evidence of the characteristics of the postmodern subject⁴² within a character that is distant from the current context of discussion about identity dynamics, it is possible to compare and discuss the understandings of the process of identity formation of the royal counselor in *The tragedy of Hamlet* in order to, parallel to the analysis of the construction and reinterpretation of Polonius, establish such character as a theoretical instrument of allegorical application for the understanding of the dynamics of contemporary subject construction.

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⁴² See note 13.

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APPENDIX

Types of actions promoted by Polonius's speeches in William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Hamlet*

Action / Character of interaction	Number of occurrences	Sequence of speeches of the character Polonius	Localization (Act / Scene)
Instruct / Reynaldo, Ophelia, Claudius, Gertrude	14	Speeches 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 27, 71, 83, 84	Act 2 Sce 1 (11 times), Act 3 Sce 1, Act 3 Sce 3, Act 3 Sce 4
Probe / Ophelia, Reynaldo, Claudius, Hamlet	14	Speeches 4, 5, 6, 23, 24, 25, 26, 35, 42, 43, 49, 50, 51, 62	Act 1 Sce 3 (3 times), Act 2 Sce 1 (4 times), Act 2 Sce 2 (7 times),
Confirm / Hamlet	11	Speeches 44, 46, 47, 58, 68, 74, 75, 76, 80, 81, 82	Act 2 Sce 2 (5 times), Act 3 Sce 2 (6 times)
Inform / Claudius, Gertrude, Hamlet, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern	9	Speeches 29, 30, 34, 54, 56, 57, 70, 79, 86	Act 2 Sce 2 (6 times), Act 3 Sce 1, Act 3 Sce 2, Act 3 Sce 4
Recommend / Claudius and Gertrude	8	Speeches 31, 38, 39, 40, 41, 71, 72, 73	Act 2 Sce 2 (5 times), Act 3 Sce 1 (3 times)
Order somebody to do something / Laertes, Ophelia, Reynaldo, actors	6	Speeches 3, 9, 10, 67, 69, 78	Act 1 Sce 3 (2 times), Act 2 Sce 1, Act 2 Sce 2, Act 2 Sce 2, Act 3 Sce 2
Greet / Reynaldo, Hamlet, Guildenstern, Rosencrantz	5	Speeches 20, 23, 52, 53, 55	Act 2 Sce 2 (5 times)
Explain something to oneself (next to Ophelia or Hamlet)	5	Speeches 28, 48, 51, 52, 61	Act 2 Sce 1, Act 2 Sce 2 (4 times)
Inquire without a probing intention / Claudius and Hamlet	5	Speeches 37, 45, 60, 63, 77	Act 2 Sce 2 (4 times), Act 3 Sce 2
Warn / Ophelia	2	Speeches 7, 8	Act 1 Sce 3 (2 times)
Praise somebody for something / Hamlet	2	Speeches 64, 66	Act 2 Sce 2 (2 times)
Ask for something / Claudius, at random	2	Speeches 1, 85	Act 1 Sce 2, Act 3 Sce 4
Adorn the speech / Claudius and Gertrude	2	Speeches 32, 33	Act 2 Sce 2 (2 times)

Advise / Laertes	1	Speech 2	Act 1 Sce 3
Introduce / actors, Hamlet, Guildenstern and Rosencrantz	1	Speech 59	Act 2 Sce 2
Persuade / Claudius and Gertrude	1	Speech 36	Act 2 Sce 2
Criticize / actors	1	Speech 65	Act 2 Sce 2

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