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From the Myth to Agape

Back in the late 1960s and 70s, in the heyday of the Lacanian Marxism, a lot of Lacan's French followers were attracted by his anti-Americanism, discernible especially in Lacan's dismissal of the ego-psychological turn of psychoanalysis as the ideological expression of the "American way of life." Although these (mostly young Maoist) followers perceived Lacan's anti-Americanism as the sign of Lacan's "anticapitalism," it is more appropriate to discern in it the traces of one of the standard conservative motifs: in today's bourgeois, commercialized, "Americanized," society, the authentic tragedy is no longer possible, which is why great conservative writers like Claudel tried to resuscitate the notion of tragedy in order to return dignity to human existence... It is precisely here, when Lacan endeavors to speak in favor of the last vestiges of old authenticity barely discernible in today's superficial universe, that his words sound as (and are) a heap of ideological platitudes. However, although Lacan's anti-Americanism stands for what is most "false" and ideological in his work, there is nonetheless a "rational kernel" in this ideological motif: the advent of modernism effectively undermines the traditional notion of tragedy and the concomitant notion of the mythical Fate which runs human destiny.

Hamlet Before Oedipus

When we speak about myths in psychoanalysis, we are effectively speaking about ONE myth, the Oedipus myth – all other Freudian myths (the myth of the primordial father, Freud's version of the Moses myth) are variations of it, although necessary ones. However, with the Hamlet narrative, things get complicated. The standard, pre-Lacanian, "naive" psychoanalytic reading of Hamlet, of course, focuses on Hamlet's incestuous desire for his mother. Hamlet's shock at his father's death is thus explained as the traumatic impact the fulfillment of an unconscious violent desire (in this case, for the father to die) has on the subject; the specter of the dead father which appears to Hamlet is the projection of Hamlet's own guilt with regard to his death-wish; his hatred of Claudius is an effect of Narcissistic rivalry – Claudius, instead of Hamlet himself, got his mother; his disgust for Ophelia and womankind in general expresses his revulsion at sex in its suffocating incestuous modality, which arises with the lack of the paternal interdiction/sanction... So, according to this standard reading, Hamlet as a modernized version of Oedipus bears witness to the strengthening of the Oedipal prohibition of incest in the passage from Antiquity to Modernity: in the case of Oedipus, we are still dealing with incest, while in Hamlet, the incestuous wish is repressed and displaced. And it seems that the very designation of Hamlet as an obsessional neurotic points in this direction: in contrast to hysteria which is found throughout all (at least Western) history, obsessional neurosis is a distinctly modern phenomenon.

While one should not underestimate the strength of such a robust heroic Freudian reading of Hamlet as the modernized version of the Oedipus myth, the problem is how to harmonize it with the fact that, although – in the Goethean lineage – Hamlet may appear as the model of the modern (introverted, brooding, indecisive) intellectual, the myth of Hamlet is older than that of Oedipus. The elementary skeleton of the Hamlet narrative (the son revenges his father against the father's evil brother who murdered him and took over his throne; the son survives the illegitimate rule of his uncle by playing a fool and making "crazy" but truthful remarks) is a universal myth found everywhere, from old Nordic cultures through Ancient Egypt up to Iran

and Polynesia. Furthermore, there are enough evidences to sustain the conclusion that the ultimate reference of this narrative does not concern family traumas, but the celestial events: the ultimate “meaning” of the Hamlet myth is the movement of stars in precession, i.e. the Hamlet myth clads into the family narrative highly articulated astronomical observations...(1) However, this solution, convincing as it may appear, also gets immediately entangled in its own impasse: the movement of stars is in itself meaningless, just a fact of nature with no libidinal resonance, so why did people translate-metaphorize it in the guise of precisely such a family narrative which generates a tremendous libidinal involvement? In other words, the question of “what means what?” is in no way decided by this reading: does the Hamlet narrative “mean” stars, or do stars “mean” Hamlet’s narrative, i.e. did the Ancients use their astronomical knowledge in order to encode insights into fundamental libidinal deadlocks of the human race?

One thing is nonetheless clear here: temporally and logically, the Hamlet narrative IS earlier than the Oedipal myth. We are dealing here with the mechanism of the unconscious displacement: something that is logically earlier is perceptible (or becomes, or inscribes itself in the texture) only as a later secondary distortion of some allegedly “original” narrative. Therein resides the often misrecognized elementary matrix of the dream-work, which involves the distinction between the latent dream-thought and the unconscious desire articulated in the dream: in the dream-work, the latent thought is ciphered/displaced, but it is through this very displacement that the other, truly unconscious thought articulates itself. So, in the case of Oedipus and Hamlet, instead of the linear/historicist reading of Hamlet as a secondary distortion of the Oedipal text, the Oedipus myth is (as Hegel already claimed) the grounding myth of the Western Greek civilization (the suicidal jump of the Sphinx representing the disintegration of the old pre-Greek universe); and it is in Hamlet’s “distortion” of the Oedipus that its repressed content articulates itself – the proof of it being the fact that the Hamlet matrix is found everywhere in pre-Classic mythology, up to the Ancient Egypt itself whose spiritual defeat is signaled by the suicidal jump of the Sphinx. (And, incidentally, what if the same goes even for Christianity: is not Freud’s thesis that the murder of God in the New Testament brings to the light the “disavowed” trauma of the Old Testament?)

Which, then, is the pre-Oedipal “secret” of Hamlet? One should retain the insight that Oedipus is a proper “myth,” and that the Hamlet narrative is its “modernizing” dislocation/corruption – the lesson is that the Oedipal “myth” (and, perhaps, the mythic “naiveté” itself) serves to obfuscate some prohibited knowledge, ultimately the knowledge about father’s obscenity.

How are then act and knowledge related in a tragic constellation? The basic opposition is that between Oedipus and Hamlet: Oedipus accomplishes the act (of killing the father), because he doesn’t know what he does; in contrast to Oedipus, Hamlet knows, and, for that very reason, isn’t able to pass to the act (of taking revenge for the father’s death). Furthermore, as Lacan emphasizes, it is not only Hamlet who knows, it is also Hamlet’s father who mysteriously knows that he is dead and even how he died, in contrast to the father from the Freudian dream who doesn’t know that he is dead – and it is this excessive knowledge that accounts for the minimal melodramatic flair of Hamlet. That is to say, in contrast to tragedy which is based on some misrecognition or ignorance, melodrama always involves some unexpected and excessive knowledge possessed not by the hero, but by his/her other, the knowledge imparted to the hero at the very end, in the final melodramatic reversal. Suffice it to recall the eminently melodramatic final reversal of Wharton’s novel *Age of Innocence* in which the husband who for long years harbored illicit passionate love for Countess Olenska, learns that his young wife all the time knew about his secret passion. Perhaps, this would also offer a way to redeem the unfortunate *Bridges of the Madison County* by Clint Eastwood: if, at the film’s end, the dying Francesca were to learn that her allegedly simple-minded, down-to-earth husband knew all the time of his wife’s brief passionate affair with the National Geographic photographer and how much this meant to her, but kept silent about it in order not to hurt her. Therein resides the enigma of knowledge: how is it possible that the whole psychic economy of a situation radically changes not when the hero directly learns something (some long repressed secret), but when he gets to know that the other (whom he mistook for ignorant) also knew it all the time and just pretended not to know to keep the appearances – is there anything more humiliating than the situation of a husband who, after a long secret love affair, all of a sudden learns that his wife knew about it all the time, but kept silent about it out of politeness or, even worse, out of love for him? In *Terms of Endearment*, Debra Winger, dying of cancer on a hospital bed, tells her son (who actively despises her for being abandoned by his father, her husband) that she is well aware of

how much he really loves her – she knows that some time in the future, after her death, he will acknowledge this to himself; at that moment, he will feel guilty for his past hatred of her mother, so she is now letting him know that she is in advance pardoning him and thus delivering him of the future burden of guilt... this manipulation of the future guilt feeling is melodrama at its best; its very gesture of pardon culpabilizes the son in advance. (Therein, in this culpabilization, in this imposition of a symbolic debt, through the very act of exoneration, resides the highest trick of Christianity.)

There is, however, a third formula to be added to this couple of “he doesn’t know it, although he does it” and “he knows it and therefore cannot do it”: “he knows very well what she is doing, and, nonetheless, he does it.” If the first formula covers the traditional hero and the second one the early modern hero, the last one, combining knowledge AND act in an ambiguous way, accounts for the late modern – contemporary – hero. This third formula allows for two thoroughly opposed readings, somewhat like the Hegelian speculative judgement in which the lowest and the highest coincide: on the one hand, “he knows very well what he is doing, and he nonetheless does it” is the clearest expression of the cynical attitude of moral depravity – “Yes, I am a scum, cheating and lying, so what? That’s life!”; on the other hand, the same stance of “he knows very well what he is doing, and he nonetheless does it” can also stand for the most radical opposite of cynicism, i.e. for the tragic awareness that, although what I am about to do will have catastrophic consequences for one’s well-being and for the well-being of those who are nearest and dearest to me, I nonetheless simply HAVE to do it on account of the inexorable ethical injunction. (Recall the paradigmatic attitude of the noir hero: he is fully aware that, if he follows the call of the femme fatale, it is only doom that awaits him, that what he is letting himself into is a double trap, that the woman will for sure betray him, but he nonetheless cannot resist and does it...) This split is not only the split between the domain of the “pathological” – of the well-being, pleasure, profit... – and the ethical injunction: it can also be the split between the moral norms that I usually follow and the unconditional injunction I feel obliged to obey, like the deadlock of Abraham who “knows very well what killing one’s own son means,” and nonetheless resolves to do it, or the Christian who is ready to commit a terrible sin (to sacrifice his eternal soul) for the higher goal of God’s glory... in short, the properly modern post- or meta-tragic situation occurs when a higher necessity compels me to betray the very ethical substance of my being.

“Thrift, thrift, Horatio!”

The basic lesson of the Hamlet myth is thus that the “mythical” form of the narrative content is not the starting point, but the end-result of a complex process of displacements and condensations: it is not enough to say that today’s myths are faked, inauthentic retro artifacts – the notion of a faked imitation of the myth should be radicalized into the notion that myth AS SUCH is a fake. Heidegger located the Greek breakthrough, the founding gesture of the “West,” in the overcoming of the pre-philosophical mythical “Asiatic” universe: the greatest opposite of the West is “the mythical in general and the Asiatic in particular.” (2) However, this overcoming is not simply a letting-behind of the mythical, but a constant struggle with(in) it: philosophy needs the recourse to myth, not only for external reasons, in order to explain its conceptual teaching to the uneducated crowds, but inherently, to “suture” its own conceptual edifice where it fails in reaching its innermost core, from Plato’s myth of the cave to Freud’s myth of the primordial father and Lacan’s myth of lamella. Myth is thus the Real of logos: the foreign intruder, impossible to get rid of, impossible to remain fully within it. Therein resides the lesson of Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: Enlightenment always already “contaminates” the mythical naive immediacy; Enlightenment itself is mythical, i.e. its own grounding gesture repeats the mythical operation. And what is postmodernity if not the ultimate defeat of the Enlightenment in its very triumph: when the dialectic of Enlightenment reaches its apogee, the dynamic, rootless postindustrial society directly generates its own myth.

In what, then, does the break of modernity exist? Which is the gap or the deadlock that the myth endeavors to cover up? One is almost tempted to return to the old moralistic tradition: capitalism originates in the sin of thrift, of the miserly disposition – the long-discredited Freudian notion of the “anal character” and its link to the capitalist accumulation receives here an unexpected boost. In Hamlet (Act I, Scene 2), the unsavory character of the excessive thrift is precisely formulated:

Horatio. My lord, I came to see your father's funeral.
Hamlet. I pray thee, do not mock me, fellow-student;
I think it was to see my mother's wedding.
Horatio. Indeed, my lord, it follow'd hard upon.
Hamlet. Thrift, thrift, Horatio! the funeral bak'd meats
Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.
Would I had met my dearest foe in heaven
Or ever I had seen that day, Horatio!

The key point is here that "thrift" does not designate just an indistinct frugality, but a specific refusal to pay its due to the proper ritual of mourning: thrift (in this case, the double use of food) violates the ritual value, the one that, according to Lacan, Marx neglected in his account of value:

This term [thrift] is a fitting reminder that, in the accommodations worked out by modern society between use values and exchange values, there is perhaps something that has been overlooked in the Marxian analysis of economy, the dominant one for the thought of our time – something whose force and extent we feel at every moment: ritual values. (3)

What, then, is the status of thrift as a vice? (4) In the Aristotelian frame of mind, it would be simple to locate thrift at the opposite extreme from prodigality, and then, of course, to construct some middle term – say, prudence, the art of moderate expenditure, avoiding both extremes – as the true virtue. However, the paradox of the miser is that he makes an excess out of moderation itself. That is to say, the standard qualification of desire focuses on its transgressive character: ethics (in the premodern sense of the "art of living") is ultimately the ethics of moderation, of resisting the urge to go beyond certain limits, a resistance against desire which is by definition transgressive – sexual passion which consumes me totally, gluttony, destructive passion which doesn't stop even at murder... In contrast to this transgressive notion of desire, the Miser invests with desire (and thus with an excessive quality) moderation itself: do not spend, economize, retain instead of letting go – all the proverbial "anal" qualities. And it is only THIS desire, the very anti-desire, that is desire par excellence. The use of the Hegelian notion of "oppositional determination [gegensätzliche Bestimmung]" (5) is here fully justified: Marx claimed that, in the series production-distribution-exchange-consumption, the term "production" is doubly inscribed, it is simultaneously one of the terms in the series and the structuring principle of the entire series: in production as one of the terms of the series, production (as the structuring principle) "encounters itself in its oppositional determination," (6) as Marx put it, using the precise Hegelian term. And the same goes for desire: there are different species of desire (i.e., of the excessive attachment that undermines the pleasure principle); among these species, desire "as such" encounters itself in its "oppositional determination" in the guise of the miser and its thrift, the very opposite of the transgressive move of desire. Lacan made this clear apropos of Molière:

The object of fantasy, image and pathos, is that other element that takes the place of what the subject is symbolically deprived of. Thus the imaginary object is in a position to condense in itself the virtues or the dimension of being and to become that veritable delusion of being [leurre de l'être] that Simone Weil treats when she focuses on the very dense and most opaque relationship of a man to the object of his desire: the relationship of Molière's Miser to his strongbox. This is the culmination of the fetish character of the object in human desire. [...] The opaque character of the object a in the imaginary fantasy determines it in its most pronounced forms as the pole of perverse desire. (7)

So, if we want to discern the mystery of desire, we should not focus on the lover or murderer in the thrall of their passion, ready to put at stake anything and everything for it, but on the miser's attitude towards his chest, the secret place where he keeps and gathers his possessions. The mystery, of course, is that, in the figure of the miser, excess coincides with lack, power with impotence, avaricious hoarding with the elevation of the object into the prohibited/untouchable Thing one can only observe, never fully enjoy. Is not the ultimate miser's aria Bartolo's "A un dottor della mia sorte" from Act I of Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*? Its obsessive madness perfectly renders the fact that he is totally indifferent towards the prospect of

having sex with the young Rosina – he wants to marry her in order to possess and guard her in the same way a miser possesses his strongbox. (8) In more philosophical terms, the paradox of the miser is that he unites the two incompatible ethical traditions: the Aristotelian ethics of moderation and the Kantian ethics of an unconditional demand that derails the “pleasure principle” – the miser elevates the maxim of moderation itself into a Kantian unconditional demand. The very sticking to the rule of moderation, the very avoiding of the excess, thus generates an excess – a surplus-enjoyment – of its own.

Capitalism, however, introduces a twist into this logic: the capitalist is no longer the lone miser who sticks to his hidden treasure, taking a secret peek at it when he is alone, behind the safely locked doors, but the subject who accepts the basic paradox that the only way to preserve and multiply one’s treasure is to spend it – Juliet’s formula of love from the balcony scene (“the more I give, the more I have”) undergoes here a perverse twist – is this formula not also the very formula of the capitalist venture? The more the capitalist invests (and borrows money in order to invest), the more he has, so that, at the end of the line, we get a purely virtual capitalist à la Donald Trump whose cash “net worth” is practically zero or even negative, yet who passes for “wealthy” on account of the prospect of future profits. So, back to the Hegelian “oppositional determination,” capitalism in a way turns around the notion of thrift as the oppositional determination (the form of appearance) of yielding to desire (i.e. consuming the object): the genus is here avarice, while the excessive limitless consumption is avarice itself in its form of appearance (oppositional determination). This basic paradox enables us to generate even phenomena like the most elementary marketing strategy, which is to appeal to the consumer’s thrift: is the ultimate message of the publicity clips not “Buy this, spend more, and you will economize, you will get a surplus for free!”? Recall the proverbial male-chauvinist image of the wife who comes home from shopping spree and informs her husband: “I’ve just spared us 200 \$! Although I wanted to buy only one jacket, I bought three, and thus got a 200 \$ discount!” The embodiment of this surplus is the toothpaste tube whose last third is differently colored, with the large letters: “YOU GET 30% FREE!” – I am always tempted to say in such a situation: “OK, then give me only this free 30% of the paste!” In capitalism, the definition of the “proper price” is a DISCOUNT price. The worn-out designation “society of consumption” thus holds only if one conceives of consumption as the mode of appearance of its very opposite, thrift. (9)

Here, we should return to Hamlet and to the ritual value: ritual is ultimately the ritual of sacrifice which opens up the space for generous consumption – after we sacrificed to gods the innermost part of the slaughtered animal (heart, intestines), we are free to enjoy a hearty meal of the remaining meat. Instead of enabling free consumption without sacrifice, the modern “total economy” which wants to dispense with this “superfluous” ritualized sacrifice generates the paradoxes of thrift – there is NO generous consumption, consumption is allowed only insofar as it functions as the form of appearance of its opposite. And was Nazism not precisely the desperate attempt to restore the ritual value to its proper place through holocaust, this gigantic sacrifice to the “obscure gods,” as Lacan put it in his Seminar XI? (10) Quite appropriately, the sacrificed object was the Jew, the very embodiment of the capitalist paradoxes of thrift. Fascism is to be situated into the series of attempts to counter this capitalist logic: apart from the Fascist corporatist attempt to “reestablish the balance” by cutting of the excess embodied in the “Jew,” one should mention the different versions of the attempt to restore the premodern sovereign gesture of pure expenditure – recall the figure of junkie, the only true “subject of consumption,” the only one who thoroughly, to his death, consumes himself in his unbound jouissance (11).

The enigma OF/IN the Other

How, then, are we to break out of the deadlock of the thrifty consumption, if these two exits are false? Perhaps, it is the Christian notion of agape that points towards the way out: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”(John 3:16) One usually opposes here the Jewish rigorous Justice and the Christian Mercy, the inexplicable gesture of undeserved pardon: we, humans, were born in sin, we cannot ever repay our debts and redeem ourselves through our own acts – our only salvation lies in God’s Mercy, in His supreme sacrifice. In this very gesture of breaking the chain of Justice through the inexplicable act of Mercy, of paying our debt, Christianity imposes on us an even stronger debt: we are forever indebted to Christ, we cannot ever repay him for what he

did to us. The Freudian name for such an excessive pressure which we cannot ever remunerate is, of course, superego.

Usually, Judaism is conceived as the religion of the superego (of man's subordination to the jealous, mighty and severe God), in contrast to the Christian God of Mercy and Love. However, it is precisely through NOT demanding from us the price for our sins, through paying this price for us Himself, that the Christian God of Mercy establishes itself as the supreme superego agency: "I paid the highest price for your sins, and you are thus indebted to me FOREVER..." Is this God as the superego agency, whose very Mercy generates the indelible guilt of believers, the ultimate horizon of Christianity? Is the Christian agape another name for Mercy?

Furthermore, is another aspect of this superego dimension of the Christian Mercy not the deadlock of the Christian universalism (recall St Paul famous "There are no man or women, no Jews and Greeks")? In other "particularistic" religions (and even in Islam, in spite of its global expansionism), there is a place for others, they are tolerated, even if they are condescendingly looked upon. The Christian motto "All men are brothers," however, means ALSO that "Those who are not my brothers ARE NOT MEN." Christians usually praise themselves for overcoming the Jewish exclusivist notion of the Chosen People and encompassing the entire humanity – the catch is here that, in their very insistence that they are the Chosen People with the privileged direct link to God, Jews accept the humanity other people who celebrate their false gods, while the Christian universalism tendentially excludes non-believers from the very universality of the humankind. So how does psychoanalysis stands with regard to this triad of paganism/Judaism/Christianity? There is an overwhelming argument for the intimate link between Judaism and psychoanalysis: in both cases, the focus is on the traumatic encounter with the abyss of the desiring Other – the Jewish people's encounter of their God whose impenetrable Call throws off the rails the routine of human daily existence; the child's encounter of the enigma of the Other's jouissance. This feature seems to distinguish the Jewish-psychoanalytic "paradigm" not only from any version of paganism and gnosticism (with their accent on the inner spiritual self-purification, on virtue as the realization of one's innermost potentials), but no less also from Christianity – does the latter not "overcome" the Otherness of the Jewish God through the principle of Love, the reconciliation/unification of God and Man in the becoming-man of God? As to the basic opposition between paganism and the Jewish break, it is definitely well-founded: both paganism and gnosticism (the reinscription of the Jewish-Christian stance back into paganism) emphasize the "inner journey" of spiritual self-purification, the return to one's true Inner Self, the self's "rediscovery," in clear contrast to the Jewish-Christian notion of an EXTERNAL traumatic encounter (the divine Call to the Jewish people, God's call to Abraham, the inscrutable Grace – all totally incompatible with our "inherent" qualities, even with our "natural" innate ethics). Kierkegaard was here right: it's Socrates versus Christ, the inner journey of remembrance versus the rebirth through the shock of the external encounter. Therein resides also the ultimate gap that forever separates Freud from Jung: while Freud's original insight concerns the traumatic external encounter of the Thing that embodies jouissance, Jung reinscribes the topic of the unconscious into the standard Gnostic problematic of the inner spiritual journey of self-discovery.

With Christianity, however, things get complicated. In his "general theory of seduction," Jean Laplanche provided the unsurpassed formulation of the encounter with the unfathomable Otherness as the fundamental fact of the psychoanalytic experience (12). However, Laplanche himself insists here on the absolute necessity of the move from the enigma of to the enigma in – a clear variation of Hegel's famous dictum apropos of the Sphinx "The enigmas of the Ancient Egyptians were the enigmas also for the Egyptians themselves":

when one speaks, to take up Freud's terms, of the enigma of femininity (what is woman?), I propose with Freud to move to the function of the enigma in femininity (what does a woman want?). In the same way (but Freud does not make this move), what he terms the enigma of the taboo takes us back to the function of the enigma in the taboo. And still more so, the enigma of mourning takes us to the function of the enigma in mourning: what does the dead person want? What does he want of me? What did he want to say to me? The enigma leads back, then, to the otherness of the other; and the otherness of the other is his response to his unconscious, that is to say, to his otherness to himself. (13)

Is it not crucial to accomplish this move also apropos of the notion of Dieu obscur, of the elusive, impenetrable God: this God has to me impenetrable also to Himself, He has to have a dark side, an otherness in Himself, something that is in Himself more than Himself? Perhaps, this accounts for the shift from Judaism to Christianity: Judaism remains at the level of the enigma OF God, while Christianity moves to the enigma IN God Himself. Far from being opposed to the notion of logos as the Revelation in/through the Word, Revelation and the enigma In God are strictly correlative, the two aspects of one and the same gesture. That is to say, it is precisely because God is an enigma also IN AND FOR HIMSELF, because he has an unfathomable Otherness in Himself, that Christ had to emerge to reveal God not only to humanity, but TO GOD HIMSELF – it is only through Christ that God fully actualizes himself as God.

Is this impenetrability of God to Himself not rendered manifest in Christ's "Father, why did you forsake me?," this Christian version of the Freudian "Father, can't you see that I am burning?"? This total abandonment by God is the point at which Christ becomes FULLY human, the point at which the radical gap that separates God from man is transposed into God himself. The Christian notion of the link between man and God thus inverts the standard pagan notion according to which man approaches God through spiritual purification, through casting off the "low" material/sensual aspects of his being and thus elevating himself towards God. When I, a human being, experience myself as cut off from God, at that very moment of the utmost abjection, I am absolutely close to God, since I find myself in the position of the abandoned Christ. There is no "direct" identification with (or approach to) the divine majesty: I identify myself with God only through identifying myself with the unique figure of God-the-Son abandoned by God.

This divine self-abandonment, this impenetrability of God to himself, signals God's fundamental imperfection. And it is only within this horizon that the properly Christian Love can emerge, a Love beyond Mercy. Love is always love for the Other insofar as he is lacking – we love the Other BECAUSE of his limitation, helplessness, ordinariness even. In contrast to the pagan celebration of the Divine (or human) Perfection, the ultimate secret of the Christian love is, perhaps, that it is the loving attachment to the Other's imperfection. And THIS Christian legacy, often obfuscated, is today more precious than ever.

Notes:

(1) I am referring here to Hamlet's Mill, the notorious New Age classic of Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend (Boston: David R. Godine Publisher, 1977).

(2) Martin Heidegger, Schelling's Treatise on Human Freedom (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985), p. 146.

(3) Jacques Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet" in Literature and Psychoanalysis, edited by Shoshana Felman (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 40. In defense of Marx, one might add that this "neglect" is not so much the mistake of Marx, but of the capitalist reality itself, i.e. of the "accommodations worked out by modern society between use values and exchange values."

(4) For this entire subchapter, I am deeply indebted to conversations with Mladen Dolar, who developed these notions much further, encompassing also the genesis of the anti-Semitic figure of the Jew from these paradoxes of the Miser.

(5) Hegel, Science of Logic (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1969), p. 431.

(6) Karl Marx, Grundrisse (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 99.

(7) Jacques Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet," cit., p. 15.

(8) This aria is to be read as part of the triangle, together with the other two great self-presentations, “Largo il factotum” and “La calumnia.”

(9) I develop here another aspect of the capitalist superego, whose logic is more fully deployed in Chapter 3 of Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute* (London: Verso, 2000).

(10) Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (New York: Norton, 1979), p. 253.

(11) Today’s attention to the drug dependence as the ultimate danger to the social edifice can only be properly understood against the background of the predominant subjective economy of consumption as the form of appearance of thrift: in previous epochs, the consumption of drugs was simply one among the half-concealed social practices, practiced by real (de Quincey, Baudelaire) and fictional (Sherlock Holmes) characters.

(12) See Jean Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

(13) Jean Laplanche, *Essays on Otherness* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 255.