

A melancholic veil of perversion

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## **Abstract**

The notion of identity is intimately linked to the way in which one conceptualises the existence of the subject. In contrast to the modern, Cartesian, conception of the subject as a self-identical, conscious agent, Lacan proposes a subject of the unconscious, a subject who emerges, through the intercession of language, in a division between (pure) being and meaning, in the realm of the Other, of the symbolic order. Put differently, the existence of the subject and, consequently, the assumption of identity, are inextricably bound to the Other. Adopting a Lacanian standpoint, the main premise of the present project is that subjectivity represents a specific mode of relating to the symbolic Other and to individual others (the mother, the father, friends, professors and so on) who form this symbolic matrix. Starting from this definition, the current project seeks to explore how identity is forged in the interaction between the subject, individual others and the symbolic Other (in its various manifestations, among which culture and research play important roles) by means of Lacanian Discourse Analysis, a method derived from Lacan's psychoanalytic framework, which acknowledges the all-permeating nature of subjectivity. Deriving from this definition of subjectivity and the associated notion of identity, the nature of (psychological) research is also called into question through an exploration of what it might mean to occupy the position of the analyst. An important consequence of employing a Lacanian approach to research becomes observable in a shift in terms of the goal of research itself: the emphasis is placed on producing a (potentially infinite) number of interpretations which are meant to accommodate the lived experience of each individual in part, while also allowing for connections to be made between such experiences, and not on generating ultimate, universally valid explanations.

KEY WORDS: MELANCHOLIA, ANECDOTAL RESEARCH, LACANIAN DISCOURSE ANALYSIS, SELF-RESEARCH

## Introduction

The present project is an attempt at untangling the reasons behind my own self-proclaimed melancholic identity as they emanate from my narration of two events which I consider to have significantly impacted my life. To this end, I have employed Lacan's psychoanalytic framework, which is versatile enough to permit a thorough analysis of the unconscious processes involved in assuming a(n) ethical subjective position; a position which in my case seems to be clothed in melancholic symptoms. This project is, therefore, designed as a self-analytical endeavour, in the sense that it explores what it means to occupy the inescapable position of the analyst. By using the term analyst here I do not imply any pretenses of expertise, but rather the constructed and constructive position which all subjects in language occupy. That is not, however, to suggest that my analysis, which can only claim the status of a collection of fantasmatic conjectures, could or should be somehow extended to others. Instead, through conducting such an analysis, my intention is to engage in the struggle of constructing meaning, of fighting for it (Neill, 2013; p.3) and even of assuming responsibility for my subjective structure, which is bound to taint all my encounters with the world.

In other words, the self-reflective nature of this work is, among other things, an attempt at ensuring a reasonable degree of honesty and transparency in terms of my involvement in the subjective process of interpretation which permeates research (Neill, 2013; p. 1-8). However, following the line of thought proposed by Freud (1991; p. 192), I feel compelled to disclose the fact that my choice of the experiences included in the analysis is partially the result of ethical, spatial and formal constraints and partially the product of my own hesitancy to write about certain matters. Despite these limitations, in my narrative, which comprises two anecdotes, I have tried to maintain a high degree of fidelity to the memories of what I believe to be life-altering experiences. The first anecdote (Appendix) is about witnessing, in the company of a friend, a tense moment between my parents, when my father was reproaching my mother for never having wanted a child. This incident seems to have provoked in me a sense of guilt and shame, which was heightened by my friend's question 'What does he mean?' (line 17) in regards to my father's accusation. Consequently, I came to associate a traumatic valence with this episode which led to a number of changes in the way I perceived myself – a strong conviction of being severely flawed, self-imposed loneliness, recurring nightmares and recourse to religion. The second anecdote (Appendix) is concerned with the transition to the first year of university life in a different country, as the promise of a potential remedy for the previously identified flaws. The emphasis falls here not only on the journey to the place of destination, a moment which provoked in me both a feeling of dread, and a sense of control, but also on the reason for the journey – mastery through knowledge.

Because I have conducted my exploration of the two anecdotes using a type of discourse analysis derived from a Lacanian psychoanalytical framework, it is necessary to briefly describe how Lacan defines the subject. Lacan challenges, on several accounts, the influential notion of the Cartesian cogito, a notion which introduces the modern concept of the subject – that of a self-identical agent, as attested by its conscious thought processes (Neill, 2011; p. 15-29). Although he criticizes Descartes for positing a conjunction between being and thought - 'ego cogito, ergo sum' (Descartes, 1999, p. 162) – and for appealing to a higher power in order to settle the matter of the fleeting, punctilious duration of the self, as it would manifest through conscious thought (Descartes, 1999; p. 83), Lacan does not simply dismiss his argument (Neill, 2011; p. 15-16). Instead, he sees in it what Descartes had overlooked, that is, the primacy of the unconscious subject that underlies the Cartesian Meditations (Neill, 2011; p. 17). From a Lacanian standpoint, what Descartes accomplishes in 'The Meditations on First Philosophy' by positing his own existence as a certainty is merely to represent himself as an image of himself for himself by means of symbolising himself (Neill, 2011, p. 15-29). That is to say that Descartes is situating himself as a signifier, a symbolic subject, within a symbolic network. In so symbolising itself, the subject posited by Descartes is already confronted with a division, a duplication imposed by language (Lacan, 1977(a); p. 676-681). Language is the condition that renders the existence of the subject simultaneously both possible and impossible (Lacan, 1977; p. 346-361; Neill, 2011; p. 23): possible because the subject can only represent itself through a signifying system and impossible because, by being so represented, the subject emerges in the realm of the Other and encounters itself as other, as the signifier replaces (pure) being (Neill, 2011; p. 21-29). In other words, the subject can be understood to represent an intimate and specific mode of relating to the symbolic Other.

In Cartesian terms, the cogito can be equated with the conscious level of thought, which Lacan considers to be chimerical, false being. Even Descartes considers that the cogito is not sufficient to support its own existence, reason for which he appeals to a higher power (God) in order to substantiate his claims regarding the temporal constancy of (his notion of the) subject (Neill, 2011; p. 25-29). In other words, consciousness points to incompleteness (Neill, 2011; p. 28). Following a Lacanian line of thought, this incompleteness, which Descartes conceals under the notion of God, points to the true locus of subjectivity, that is, to the unconscious, where the subject emerges briefly in response to the uncertainty that marks its (lack of) existence, and, as such, it takes responsibility for its assuming a position (Neill, 2011; p. 29). However, this is not to say that this subject is commensurate with the unconscious (Neill, 2011; p. 29). Consequently, Lacan proposes a subject of the unconscious (Fink, 1995; *passim*; Neill, 2011; *passim*), a subject that comes to assume a(n ethical) position by encountering itself in a division between meaning and being in the realm of the Other, of the symbolic order (Fink, 1995; p. 51-53; Neill, 2011; p.23-25). The subject is precipitated into (its lack of) existence by its confrontation with the desire of the (m)Other/other which will come to be assimilated also as desire for the (m)Other/other (Fink, 1995; p. 50, 54-58; Neill, 2011; p. 41). More specifically, the individual can only assume a subjective position at the point of the encounter with a pre-existing (and succeeding) symbolic field, a locus which coincides with the intersection of three realms - the symbolic, the imaginary and the real. This encounter entails a forced choice of renouncing (pure)

being in favour of meaning (Neill, 2011; p. 25). The subject comes to be through unconsciously adopting a position in regards to a signifying system (Homer, 2005, p.19; Neil, 2011; p. 15-29; Zizek, 2006, p. 4) that is at the core of itself and beyond itself (Neill, 2011, p. 21). In Lacan's words, the unconscious is 'the discourse of the other' (Lacan, 1957; p. 436). As a consequence, the construction of the self is inextricably bound to the symbolic Other and, implicitly, to the imaginary others that collectively form the symbolic network which is, however, beyond any of these individuals (Fink, 1995; p. 5; Neill, 2011; p. 21). This is to say that the relationship between the subject, the Other and individual others is not, and cannot ever be symmetrical (Neill, 2011; p. 47; Neill, 2013; p. 5-6).

It is this asymmetry of the interaction and its implications at a personal and social level that will represent the focal point of this project. Although I cannot have access to the objective reality of the event I have experienced when I was seven, which would have not been considered an event at all without subjective involvement, it is my memory- reconstructed perception that my parents' exchange of reproaches has resulted in the change of the way in which I conceived of myself which has motivated me to conduct this analysis. From this perspective, the imaginary inner metamorphosis was imposed, to an extent, from without, from the socially regulated notions of marriage and family, through the dynamic they (fail to) sustain, and the imaginary others who come to occupy socially defined roles. That is not to say that someone else holds responsibility for my perception. On the contrary, since it is my assumption, responsibility for it falls onto me (Neill, 2011; p. 29). However, this conception of my self does not remain confined within myself, but is constantly propagated, in a subjectively altered form, back to the inter-subjective from which it was seeded and by which is continually modified. My misperception of my father's reproach to my mother, that of never having wanted me, has unavoidably caused a change not only on an individual level, but also in the way in which I relate to my parents and to other people, a transformation which has perhaps culminated in my decision to reflect back on how the two anecdotes may relate to each other, in the context of this project, in order to construct my present perspective; for regardless of the temporal and physical distance from the real events which have led to my memories, it is the present that I am trying to construct. In this sense, the exploration of the present, and of the past from which it originates, becomes a shield against the threat of the real. In other words, this analysis is an attempt to establish symbolic connections both between myself and imaginary others and between various subjective manifestations within myself.

The brief and partial definition of subjectivity mentioned above points to an essential underlying issue that will be at the core of this project – the nature of the relationship between my self, the symbolic Other (language) and imaginary others, as it is in this interaction that subjectivity comes to be manifested and is constantly molded. Although language is the condition upon which the (im)possibility of the existence of subjectivity depends, meaning is not inherent in language (Neill, 2013; p.4). Despite the grounding influence that it exerts on the subject, language, the Other, the symbolic field, is but a subjective assumption of a virtual nature. In other words, it exists only insofar as the subjects believe in it (Zizek, 2006, p. 22-40). Nonetheless, the symbolic Other dictates how the subject conceives of itself, of

imaginary others and of truth, and can, at times, lead to calamitous outcomes. It is, therefore, of utmost importance to acknowledge the all-permeating influence of language, and to develop an awareness of its illusory and insubstantial character, so as to attempt to unlock various developmental potentialities (on both social and personal levels). To an extent, this is the aim, in Lacan's view, of psychoanalysis – to provide an explanation of the process through which reality constitutes itself and thus to allow the subject to confront the most radical coordinates of its existence – its (unconscious) desire (Zizek, 2006, p. 4).

The link between (the formative function of) language and the subject is further strengthened through Lacan's assertion that the unconscious is structured like a language (Lacan, 1957; *passim*). In the postface to the 'Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'', Lacan explains how Freud's discovery of the implicit memory of the unconscious through the repetition automatism (*Wiederholungszwang*) can shed light on the structure of the unconscious (Lacan, 1966; p. 34-48). He lays out a model through which a language can be created *ex nihilo* by means of law (Lacan, 1966; p. 35). Through the use of overdetermined symbols, Lacan creates a layered syntax which allows only certain combinations, at specific times, while inhibiting others, as a result of the order of preceding symbols (Fink, 1995; p. 158; Lacan, 1966; p. 34-48). In this sense, the structure has a memory, because the laws that govern it determine the following symbols on the basis of the combinations permitted by the preceding symbols (Lacan, 1966; p. 37). These restrictions upon the symbolic order which predetermine, to an extent, its unfolding and, implicitly, certain repetitions (reminiscent of Freud's repetition automatism), once more draw attention to the constitutive function of the symbol which subverts the subject (Lacan, 1966; p. 34). By employing notions from Saussurian linguistics, Lacan argues that symptoms are metaphors and that a subject's desire is a metonymy (Lacan, 1957; p. 439). Thus, conceptualising the unconscious as having the structure of a language, Lacan posits that it is by changing the subject's relationship to the signifier that symptoms can be understood and eliminated (Lacan, 1957; p. 432-438).

Throughout the current project I have adopted this perspective and, with the aim of grasping a degree of understanding of the unconscious reasons behind my choice to conceive of myself in melancholic terms, I have focused on my own melancholic symbolic output. The emphasis on the language I have used to capture two of my most life-altering experiences seems all the more justified in the light of Darian Leader's idea that melancholia is caused by a symbolic impasse in which the subject finds itself (Leader, 2009; p. 186-200) and Lacan's statement that solutions can be found if they are formulated as signifying equations (Lacan, 1957; p. 432). It can be argued, thus, that language occupies a central role for multiple overlapping processes: the emergence of subjectivity, a moment which is equivalent, in a sense, with the assumption of an ethical position (Neill, 2011; p. 193-235), the construction of fantasy, which implies a formulation of symptoms pertaining to the individual's subjective structure and a means of eliminating these symptoms (Lacan, 1957; p. 423-438).

Given the all-pervasive character of subjectivity and its inextricable connection to language, as well as the self-analytical nature of my project, it is now necessary to explain what I mean by the notion of melancholia, which is the symptom that prompted me to conduct this analysis. My self-identification as melancholic is an extimate construct, as it is only through a misperceived mirroring in others that I have come to think of myself in this way. My initial reaction after witnessing my parents' fight, which could, perhaps, be best describes retrospectively as dejection, has only subsequently been moulded into a melancholic image through the reading of authors such as Eminescu, Poe, Proust, Petrescu and Byron afforded by the long-hours of self-imposed exile into the library. I have traced the coordinates of my melancholic identity by engaging with literary reflections on existential themes such as profound sadness, meaninglessness and hopelessness. That is to say that I have sought to symbolise my own imaginary impasse through another's words. But in so doing, I have already altered not only my own condition, but also the meaning of the text. Thus, my meaning of melancholia reflects my subjectivisation of the literature that I have encountered, at the point of conjunction between my desire and the desires which have found expression in poetry and prose. However, because of the literary means of my introduction to melancholia, I believed the applicability of the term to be restricted to artistic expression and abandoned it in favour of the seemingly more psychologically valid notion of depression, until my supervisor pointed out Freud's definition of melancholic states; yet another example of the interaction between the subject (myself), the symbolic Other (language, through its miscellany of meanings) and imaginary others (my supervisor, Freud). Therefore, in accordance with Darian Leader's criticism of the misleadingly progressive notion of depression and of its accompanying disregard for the richness of mental life, for the purpose of the present project, I have discarded the concept of depression and, instead, returned to the Freudian notion of melancholia as a more efficient and precise conceptual tool for dealing with the complexity and diversity which characterises human life (Leader, 2009, p. 3-7).

Freud (1917) begins his essay on 'Mourning and Melancholia' by drawing attention to the lack of a unitary clinical definition of melancholia. He then proceeds to unveil the picture of melancholia by relating it to mourning. For Freud (1917), both mourning and melancholia are responses to loss. However, the nature of this response is different in each of the two instances. It is important to note here that the concept of loss presented by Freud is not restricted to the idea of bereavement, but encompasses notions that range from disappointment to the loss of an ideal. The loss of a loved one, of an abstraction pertaining to a relationship with a loved one, or of an ideal to which one was attached usually leads, in the healthy individual, to a period of mourning that is overcome through the work of mourning, through which the libido successfully detaches itself from the memories of the lost loved object (Freud, 1917). However, there is nothing outwith language that can guarantee the accuracy of what is understood as clinical normalcy and this becomes apparent with the multitude of changes characteristic of clinical diagnoses (Loose, 2002; p. 212-234).

According to Freud, mourning is characterised by a withering interest in the external world as well as a temporary incapacity to adopt a new object of love. In

contrast to mourning, which is considered to be a normal response due to its evident causes and transitory character, melancholia is portrayed, in Freud's account, as a pathological condition. The characteristics of melancholia overlap to a great extent with those of mourning: a suppression of most or all activity, a 'cessation of interest in the outside world' and 'a profoundly painful dejection' (Freud, 1917, p. 244). However, there is one feature that is not manifested by mourners, namely a worrying decrease in self-regard. Indeed Freud considered this diminution of self-regard to be the defining aspect of melancholia and produced an explanation of this condition that is focused on the melancholic's tendency and insistence to berate himself/herself. Thus, it becomes apparent that the main difference between mourning and melancholia lies in the nature of the response to the loss of the loved object. That is to say that while the mourner has a fairly accurate knowledge of what she/he has lost, access to such insight seems to evade the melancholic. In the case of the melancholic, the loss operates predominantly at an unconscious level, thus denying the individual the possibility of understanding 'what he has lost' (Freud, 1917, p. 244). Because of the unconscious, more ideal essence of the loss at work here, the 'command of reality' (Freud, 1917, p. 245) cannot prevail in melancholia.

Freud argues that the self-reproaches that so distinctively plague the melancholic represent the absorption of the reproaches directed toward the loved object into the individual's ego. From a Freudian vantage point, these symptoms are indicative of two structural aspects of the melancholic subject. First, they show that the individual has indeed lost something in relation to an object and that this loss is experienced at the level of the ego (Freud, 1917; p. 247). Second, the insistence on shamelessly repeating the inaccurately self-directed criticism suggests that these reproaches are in fact aimed at the loved object in relation to which the person has suffered a loss, but are instead deployed onto the individual's ego (Freud, 1917; p. 248). On this basis, Freud theorises on the ambivalent nature of the relation between the individual and his/her love object. He argues that the tendency to fall ill in melancholia is determined by the narcissistic nature of the object-choice (Freud, 1917; p. 249). Thus, although the relationship with the object of love was terminated, the libidinal attachment to the object is not withdrawn and projected onto a new one. Instead, the object-cathexis regresses to narcissism causing, on the one hand an identification of the ego with the lost loved object, partly because of self-love and partly in an attempt to salvage the love for the object, and on the other hand a reversion to sadism, aimed at punishing, in some form, the lost object of love (Freud, 1917; p. 248-252).

Freud draws attention to the connection between melancholia and narcissistic afflictions, where the ego chooses the love object primarily by means of identification, which is reflected in the cannibalistic desire of the ego to integrate the object by devouring it (Freud, 1917; p. 249-250). Moreover, Freud argues that it is this identification and narcissistic regression that leads the ego to treat itself as an object and to mistakenly unleash onto itself all the hostility originally directed at an external object, which in some cases results in actual suicide (Freud, 1917; p. 252). For the purpose of this project I have adhered to the description advocated by Freud, and, later on, by Leader, as a starting point for my analyses.



By adopting a Lacanian framework, which emphasises the all-encompassing influence of language, I have attempted to dismantle my own melancholic fantasy, through the analysis of my narration of two moments that have significantly influenced my life. The process of choosing which two experiences to include has been influenced by a number of factors, the most significant being the necessity to adhere to the University's ethical regulations. Were it not for this, perhaps my choice of anecdotes would have been different. Another reason which has led to the inclusion of these two experiences as opposed to others is my reluctance to broach certain aspects of my existence in the context of an Honours project. With these considerations in mind, however, I have to emphasise the fact that the two moments chosen have considerably affected me in various and previously inexplicable ways and that I have striven to ensure that my narration captures my memories as closely as possible. In that sense, I have made very few concessions. In selecting the two events, apart from the criteria mentioned above, I have solely relied on the degree of disruption they have caused and not on other characteristics.

My focus on life-altering experiences stems from the position that trauma holds in the Lacanian framework which I have employed. Traumatic events attest to a remnant of the real which, despite the all-pervasive nature of the symbolic, eludes recuperation into language, thus leading to a blockage (Fink, 1995, p.26). It is important to note here that the construction 'life-altering events' does not refer exclusively to negative experiences. Seemingly positive events can alter one's life in a very similar manner to overtly negative experiences (Leader, 2009; p.21-22). Perhaps one of the most common examples is that of the individual reaching, after considerable effort, his/her goal just to realise that this ideal is not it, not the answer to all questions, not the piece that would make them complete and thus that they feel a sense of void, a lack that they will try to cover up by adopting a new goal, which, in turn, will not be it either and so on (Leader, 2009; p. 22; Neill, 2011; p. 56-72). This, in the mode of fantasy, usually attests to a series of substitutions and displacements of objects of love (Fink, 1995; p. 26). However, in the case of melancholia, such displacement is not possible; it is blocked (Fink, 1995; p. 26). The fixation entailed by trauma becomes obvious, as the individual is unable to properly articulate, and so to (partially) bring into the symbolic, the parts of the real that are at the core of their condition (Fink, 1995, p.26). However elusive the real causes of melancholia are, some degree of insight can be gained by analysing the unconscious locus of subjectivity as it emerges from my melancholic account of traumatic experience.

Another aspect that needs to be explained is the anecdotal character of the present research. Fineman (as cited in Gallop, 2002; p. 8) argues that, etymologically, anecdote (from the Greek *Anekdotia*) refers to something unpublished, a secret and thus indirectly points, on another level, to the unknown, unconscious, and defines it as 'the narration of a singular event' (p. 2). This project attempts, through its narrative, to carry out an analysis of a collection of anecdotes. The emphasis here on the collection of anecdotes holds a high degree of importance on the intra-individual dimension. Before going into more depth, it is necessary to introduce here Darian Leader's concept of 'dialogue of mournings' by which he refers to the process of substituting unspeakable aspects of one's mourning with someone else's story of loss, thus properly initiating mourning (Leader, 2009; p. 78-79). Considering the similarities between mourning and melancholia (the most salient being the fact that they are both hypothesised to involve loss) and the blockage, the impaired capacity of symbolising the trauma which results from the encounter with the real that characterises melancholia, I suggest that a dialogue of melancholias can lead to similarly positive outcomes as a dialogue of mournings: shedding light, through symbolic representations, on matters that previously could have not been understood and thus jolting into motion the process of symbolisation. In a sense, the present work can be regarded as the result of such a process. In the context of a dialogue of melancholias and within the Lacanian framework, which rejects the idea of a core self, the multidimensionality of the collection of anecdotes on which this project is centered around becomes more nuanced. At the intra-personal level, my narrative comprises two anecdotes, each of which attests to a different (unconscious) self. By narrating, two life-altering experiences, I have aimed at facilitating a dialogue between different melancholic moments within myself through analyses that have generated new meanings and new connections between signifiers. What the idea of dialogue accentuates is the fact that events do not just happen, but are something to which the individual responds and makes meaning out of (Gallop, 2002; p. 130), a fact which motivates the subject to proceed in a somewhat similar manner by way of creation. Through the self-analysis of anecdotes I have retrospectively constructed not only the meaning of my life, but also my perception of the way in which that meaning was constructed in the first place.

Last, but not least, I would like to explain my choice of a self-analytical design. While it may seem unorthodox, my status as analysand does not undermine my position as analyst in the context of the Lacanian framework on which this work is based, as the meanings of my unconscious (desire) are utterly impenetrable outside analysis. In fact, before beginning the process of analysis, at the moment of narration, I was unable to clearly perceive the connection between the two anecdotal moments; I could only assume the existence of a link between the experiences mentioned. My involvement in both aspects seeks to acknowledge the subjectivity which is inherent in every piece of psychological research and, by so doing, to illustrate how it influences the conclusions drawn, to show, in Gallop's words, 'how theory is lived by the theorizing subject' (Gallop, 2002; p. 11).

However, this is not the only reason for involving myself in research in this manner. The impossible choice of occupying two positions (that of the analyst and that of the analysand) at once hints to a certain self-drawn split, a split which I could only barely distinguish before the analysis, but which, nonetheless, reflects the structure of my fantasy. Thus, even before the beginning of the analysis, I have already been confronted with manifestations of my unconscious subjective structure in the form of the choice of the object and of the design of my exploration.

For the purpose of analysing the collection of anecdotes mentioned above, I have adopted a type of discourse analysis derived from the Lacanian framework – Lacanian Discourse Analysis, which aims at uncovering the structure of the subject, which implicitly attests to the place where an individual is in their quest for the truth (Lacan, 1957; p. 421). In other words, this method of analysis is sensitive to the ethical dimension of the emergence of subjectivity through and in language. Another benefit of using the Lacanian approach to discourse analysis is that it offers the means for a structured analysis of a narrative that prevents the analyst from straying too far in the realm of imaginary identification, while, at the same time, it acknowledges the subjective limitations of any analytical endeavour. From a Lacanian perspective, an analysis must proceed by disentangling the three realms that make up the discourse: the symbolic, the imaginary and the real and by ‘mapping the discourse’ (Neill, 2013; p. 7-12). The Lacanian approach proposes that every discourse is comprised of the same four structural positions as it follows:

agent → other  
truth // product

However, these four spaces come to be inhabited by four potential mathemes that sequentially shift from one position to another, according to the different social relations portrayed. These four elements are: \$, the barred, incomplete subject, S1 - the master signifier, the signifier that appears to dominate the discourse, and that sets into motion the S2 - the chain of signifiers and a - objet petit a, which refers to the subjective experience that emerges through and as a response to the intersection of the symbolic, the imaginary and the real (Neill, 2013; p. 10-11). The permutations of the four signifiers result in four models of discourse (Neill, 2013; p. 14):

Discourse of the the	Discourse of the	Discourse of the	Discourse of
Master	Hysteric	Analyst	University
S1 → S2	\$ → S1	a → \$	S2 → a
\$ // a	a // S2	S2 // S1	S1 // \$

For the narrative under analysis, I have employed all four models of discourse, so to avoid, to the best of my ability, not only an excessive imaginary identification, but also fixating on one particular explanation, at the expense of the miscellaneous facets of subjectivity.

## Analyses

As previously mentioned, this section comprises my analysis of two anecdotes and the connections I have established between them in the creative process of reading and exploring the narrative on which they are based. It is essential to note that the following analysis does not hold any pretense of objectivity and/or generalisability. Instead, I would like to emphasise its highly subjective nature which derives from the fact that discourse cannot be approached but by a subject which, through its preconceptions and presuppositions imagines that it can understand the meaning of that discourse by a process of fluid identification with certain parts of the text (Neill, 2013; p. 2-3). In other words, imaginary identification, which already implies a notion of the self, of identity, is a prerequisite for understanding any type of discourse (Neill, 2013; p. 2-4). On the other hand, the idea of a self cannot exist outside the symbolic order of the discourse, for discourse permeates all the subject's dealings with its world (Neill, 2013; p. 4-7). Therefore, even when I am reading my own analysis, I can only imagine that I understand what I am saying, for the 'I' doing the reading is different from the 'I' writing down the experiences, which, in turn, is far from identical to the 'I' living through those events.

What can be inferred from the above is that there is no possibility of exorcising the imaginary dimension out of the encounter with a text, because such a text would be nothing outside imaginary identification (Neill, 2013; p. 6). This points to the fact that 'reading/analysis is a creative process' and that 'meaning doesn't inhere in language, it inheres in the act of reading/listening' (Neill, 2013; p. 4). Moreover, the meaning generated by one subject through reading/listening is not singular. Consequently, I do not assume that the interpretations put forth through this project are the only ones possible. A potentially infinite number of readings could be produced as there is no way of accessing an objective, real object. What I have accessed, however, at the same time with the message, is a network of possible alternative, lateral meanings, in the Saussurian sense, a network which correlates to the Lacanian understanding of the unconscious (Hook, 2013; p. 40).

The Lacanian understanding differs from Freud's in that it does not assume the unconscious to be the intra-individual locus of impulses and primal needs, but

something akin to an extimate matrix of symbols (Hook, 2013; p. 42-43; Pavon Cuellar, 2010; p.176-178), to and through which the subject responds in specific ways. Thus, it is impossible to unify the polyvalent interpretations into one all-encompassing perspective. In Lacan's words, 'there is no universe of language' (as cited in Neill, 2013; p. 4). The inability to bring everything within the limits of the symbolic suggests the persistence of something outwith, something which Lacanian theory terms the real (Fink; 1995; p. 24-26; Neill, 2011; p. 60-63; Neill, 2013; p. 6). It is at the conjunction of the real with the imaginary and the symbolic that the (Lacanian) subject comes into existence. Simplistically, the symbolic refers to a structural function, which, through means of equivalence and differentiation, makes discourse (and the existence of the subject) possible (Hook, 2013; p. 4; Neill, 2013; p. 5). The imaginary realm includes something that the symbolic lacks – meaning, which is constructed, through subjective involvement, by identification (Neill, 2013; p. 3-7). However, those imaginary identifications facilitated by the symbolic are only ever illusory, because they never access the real object in itself, which always evades symbolisation – the Lacanian real (Neill, 2013; p. 62). The intimate connection between the three realms can be observed in the emergence of the subject upon which their existence (at least to an extent) is contingent. As such, it can be argued that discourse is the most conspicuous manifestation of the subject and can reveal something about its structure. However, in order to glimpse at this subjective structure, it is necessary to separate imaginary readings from symbolic readings, that is, to maintain a high degree of fidelity to the text by focusing on its symbolic elements, while, at the same time, acknowledging the imminent and illusory nature of imaginary identification (Neill, 2013; p. 3-7).

The next section brings to the foreground the exploration of my subjective structural position as it is gradually unveiled through a tentative analysis of my melancholic fantasy. The four types of discourse derived from Lacan's theory draw attention, once again, to the intimate relationship between the symbolic, the imaginary and the real. However, each of them focuses more closely on a certain dimension. As such, it became apparent that the Discourse of the Master mainly addresses the intra-individual aspects of the fantasy, while the Discourse of the University is centered on the larger social context. The Discourse of the Hysteric emphasises the connection between my different subjective moments. The explanation for my fantasy, which can itself be no more than fantasmatic, finds its expression in my identification of my subjective clinical structure through the Discourse of the Analyst. Each of these salient aspects is explored in the proceeding section.

The narrative in question can be roughly delimited into two parts. The first of these, the most chronologically distant, is a memory-mediated reconstruction of the way in which my seven year old self has interpreted a fight between my parents and of the (assumed) long-term consequences that interpretation has had: self-imposed loneliness, restlessness and discontentment with life, which have led me to conceive of myself in melancholic terms. The second anecdote refers, still through the prism of the reconstructive processes of memory, to my first journey to Canada; from the anxiety-laden moments before departure, to the subsequent emotional numbness of the first month in Regina

At the intra-individual level, one of the most prominent characteristics of my fantasy seems to be a reenactment of the constitutive split through which I assumed a subjective position, this time with the ideal ego and the ego ideal, cast in the leading roles. By ideal ego and ego ideal I refer here to my idealised image of the object towards which my desire is directed, and, respectively, to that of the symbolic which facilitates the transcendence of the imaginary confusion between the idealised image of my ideal ego and the objects that, momentarily, appear to coincide with it (Neill, 2011; p. 37). This dynamic transpires from what 'I', as the researcher, perceive, through the analysis of the 'I' 's written account of the events, to be an exacerbated sense of guilt for the parents' unsuccessful marriage of the 'I' living those experiences first hand. It seems that the re-staging of this split is brought about, in this particular case, through the (simultaneous) encounter of the infantile narcissism to which Freud refers in 'Totem and Taboo' (Freud, 1918; p.48-54) with the (almost literal) Father's no-saying (*le non du pere*) and the Father's name, *le nom du pere* (Fink, 1995; p. 57; Homer, 2005; p. 53), which, however, fail here to properly carry out their function.

Freud asserts that despite later ongoing development, infantile structures and wishes persist and can resurface whenever the individual is in a traumatising situation (Freud, 1918; ix). Based partly on a reinterpretation of Freud, Lacan sets out to offer a more detailed account of the unconscious processes involved. He argues that the infant which finds himself/herself in the mirror stage, that is, in the phase before the child's emergence as a subject in the symbolic field, acknowledges his/her own image in the mirror in 'a flutter of jubilant activity' (Lacan, 1949; p.76). This image becomes the anticipation of the future motor coherence that the infant still lacks, an almost antithetic imago to the child's perceived fragmentation (Lacan, 1949; p. 76). Consequently, this image will be internalised and invested with libidinal energy and elevated to the level of the 'ideal ego' (*Idealich*), the starting point of subsequent secondary identifications and the structuring function for the ego, which will give rise to fantasies of (an alienating) identity (Lacan, 1949; p. 76-78). Proceeding henceforth, the network of interactions with others constitutes the ego ideal (Neill, 2011; p. 37). Neill (2011; p.36) defines the ego ideal as 'a properly subjective function', as that which facilitates the transition beyond the objectifying coincidence of images entailed by the ideal ego (Neill; 2011; p. 35-37). It is important to mention here that the notion of mirror, in Lacanian understanding, refers to anything that reflects and unavoidably alters the infant's image of himself/herself – an actual mirror, the parents, other family members etc. (Neill, 2011; p. 36). However, at this stage, the infant is still in a state of motor and sensory disjunction and, thus, experiences himself/herself as somewhat undifferentiated from the mother's body, which he/she encounters as an extension of his/her own (Fink, 1995; p. 55). The severance from the mother comes through the Name-of-the-Father/ Father's Name, the paternal metaphor (Fink, 1995; p. 56-58), which is adjacent to the intercession of the Other's demand on need and the advent of language (Neill, 2011; p. 52-55). All these events culminate in the constitution of the barred subject (Neill, 2011; p. 55). Therefore, the split subject emerges in a symbolic matrix through constantly negotiating relations of equivalence with and between imaginary others in symbolic terms. The paternal function converts the real of the (perhaps dangerous) mother-child dyad into a social situation by introducing the desire of the Other and forces him/her to seek pleasure in socially acceptable ways (Fink, 1995; p. 56-57).

The mother's desire is substituted for a name (Fink, 1995; p. 57). Put differently, it can be argued that a dialectical movement is initiated through this substitution and displacement, whereby the desire of the mother can be filled with various signifiers (Fink, 1995; p. 57). Substitution is only possible in language and the mother's desire can only retroactively be instated as a 'first' signifier and, more generally, as the signifier of the Other's desire (Fink, 1995; p. 57).

The result of the intervention of the paternal metaphor, which involves a separation, is the emergence of the subject as dislodged from the Other, and its encounter of itself as a lacking and, consequently, desiring subject (Fink, 1995; p. 58). As such, the subject's desire is always related to something in the Other (Neill, 2011; p. 57). The subject craves for the mythical unity, the *jouissance* that it must have lost in the constitutive process of alienation through language (Neill, 2011; p. 57). *Objet petit a* is that which the subject retrospectively assumes it has lost, that which is both at the core of the subject and perpetually beyond it (Neill, 2011; p. 57). *Objet petit a* is the extimate cause of the subject, a subject whose (lack of) existence is only possible through the retroactive subjective assumption of the cause (Neill, 2011; p. 72). The manner in which the subject desires to be positioned in relation to, and the way in which it defends its imaginary self from, the desire of the Other is represented by the subject's fantasy (Neill, 2011; p. 61). Lacan defines the formula of fantasy as the subject's relationship with its object of desire, *objet petit a*: ( $\$ \diamond a$ ) (Neill, 2011; p. 60-61).

Before going into more depth with the analysis, it is necessary to mention one more thing. Because of its precarious position, determined both by its own maturational processes and to competition from other people, the subject comes to interpret the 'I', the ego, as a form of defense and deploys a significant amount of libido to it (Lacan, 1949; p. 79). Lacan terms this libidinal cathexis 'primary narcissism' (Lacan, 1949; p. 79), a term evocative of Freud's notion of infantile narcissism, but which underlines the former's primacy and its formative function. In terms of the first narrative, it can be argued that it is this point of encounter of this 'primary' narcissism with the desire of the Other, which leads to the split between, and the formation of, the ideal ego and ego ideal that comes to dominate this discourse. Therefore, it can be said that this encounter and the simultaneous split have come to organise my fantasy on multiple levels, the first of which is that of the 'I' experiencing the events directly. In that sense, the reconstructed memory of that specific 'I' seems to endorse the view that it is, or that it can be the object-cause for its mother's desires. Primary narcissism is manifested here in the shape of the illusory self-identification as someone else's *objet petit a* – most likely that of my mother. 'I'/it assume(s) that it itself is the missing piece for the mother's complete *jouissance* and, conversely, that her unhappiness is an indication of a fault in the 'I': 'I think I interpreted the nightmares as a reinforcement of the fact that there was something wrong with me, since I could not find another reason why my mother would have not wanted me' (lines 29-31). This misidentification seems to support Freud's emphasis on narcissistic regression in melancholia (Freud, 1917; p. 248-252).

An interesting twist is introduced by my witnessing my father's assertion that my mother had never wanted a child, a girl. While it does not seem to change my unconscious belief that I was the imaginary phallus of the mother, my father's reproach affected my perception of the direction of my mother's desire. Her desire was then seen in a reversed manner as the desire for the lack of my existence, and it can retroactively be interpreted that from that moment on I started identifying myself with this very lack of existence; that I have striven to fulfill her desire by simulating the lack of existence towards which, it seems, I unconsciously believed her desire to be directed: 'I started spending a lot of time by myself in the hope that my parents would get along with each other if they did not have to deal with me too much' (lines 31-33). It is, perhaps, through this misperception of the direction of my mother's desire that my self-berating, the trademark of Freudian melancholia, can be understood in this case. Reproaches were aimed at myself, and not at the lost object as Freud (1917; p. 248) would suggest, in order to conform to the misperception of my mother's desire.

An exaggerated sense of responsibility and the self-reproach associated with the impossibility of upholding it seems to be a recurring theme in the accounts of melancholics (Freud, 1917; p. 248; Leader, 2009; p. 184). This pattern appears in the anecdote under scrutiny too, and could be interpreted as a sign of the repetition automatism, or, more accurately, a repetition compulsion, which has driven me to perpetuate a fantasy that duplicates the traumatic moment of my subjective constitution, a moment that extends far beyond the early years (Neill, 2011; p. 42). Through the perception of my father's intervention, both in its actual occurrence and metaphoric replication of the paternal function, I was once again explicitly confronted with (a misperception of) my mother's desire and the powerlessness of my father. The paternal figure seems to have been largely ignored here, since the emphasis is on what my father said about my mother's desire and not on his role. Nonetheless, a different explanation could be that, in fact, I have not disregarded my father's reproachful remark, but that I have elevated it to the status of my mother's ultimate desire. Such an interpretation is telling about my memory-reconstructed perception, which is different from that of my first-hand experiences, and which reflects the subjective position entailed by my current fantasy. However, in both cases, I seem to repeatedly confine the figure of the father to a secondary, inferior position.

It is particularly interesting how the eruption of the real in the unconscious echoes the disturbance of the narcissistic illusory identification with a misperception of the parental objet petit a, the split between the ideal ego and the ego ideal, at the level of dreams: 'Soon after that day, I started having nightmares about being killed' (lines 24-25). The nightmares appear to point to a dimension that was far beyond my imaginary misidentification, a facet that threatened my traumatically precipitated existence, and which can only be inferred to be the Lacanian real. For Lacan, trauma entails a remnant of the real, a residue that can never be captured within language (Fink, 1995; p.26). Although my fantasy (at different subjective moments) seems to have situated my ideal ego, as an object, at/as the center of my mother's fantasy, the real which structured the unconscious portrayed my fantasy's fragile nature. What my subjective response was constructed around without ever grasping is the point of collision between the desires of the parents, which, contrary to the reconstructed perception of this particular 'I', was not entirely directed towards my self. Therefore,



the nightmares can be interpreted as intrusions of the real which accentuate the paradoxical nature of my fantasy on multiple planes. This 'I's simultaneous confrontation with the impossibility of undoing the split into the ideal ego and ego ideal and of embodying the parental objet petit a led to its perceiving of the external as a danger threatening to annihilate it. It is also possible that the dreams represent wish fulfillments, brought about by semantic proximity between my father's enunciation of my mother's desire and the notion of death. An alternative explanation is that dreams about being killed, in fact, reflect my own desire to kill – an expression of the unavoidably ambivalent feelings that characterise any human relationship (Freud, 1917; p. 248-253; Freud, 1918; p. 116-117; Hook, 2013; p. 45). Moreover, the desire to kill could also be interpreted as the desire to exchange the passive role, assigned to my younger self simultaneously through its biological immaturity of the early years and through my misperception of my mother's desire, for an active one, a position that would allow me to be in control (Verhaeghe, 2004; p. 419).

Ultimately, it may be said that this resulting subjective structure, my former self, is confronted with the misperceived lack of lack in the mother, a lack which becomes confused with my own imaginary inexistence and which hinders the dialectisation of desire. Consequently, my desire was/is the desire of my mother (Neill, 2011; p. 40), in the multilayered sense that it is desire to be desired by my mother, which implicitly entails the desire to be recognized by her (Loose, 2002; p. 181; Neill, 2011; p. 40), and desire for the very otherness of the (first) Other (Neill, 2011; p. 40), but in a very specific way – through a relationship of knowledge that reduces the Other to not Other, that would allow me to deny, partially, the castration imposed by language (Hyldgaard, 2004). The first dimension of desire is reminiscent of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic which posits that self-consciousness can only exist as long as it is recognised by another full-consciousness (Hegel, 1807; p. 65). But in order for it to be recognised, it has to recognise the other as worthy of doing the recognition, which leads to a paradoxical situation that may result in a violent confrontation (Hegel, 1807, p. 66-67). Granted that both parties survive, a hierarchy is created: the master dominates the slave, but the recognition it gets is somewhat unsatisfying, as it comes from an inferior, while the slave, under the threat of death is forced to work for the master, a type of work that will come to reflect the bondsman's existence, thus circumventing the need for the recognition of the master. It could be argued that the work of the enslaved 'I' here is the gathering of knowledge that can be used to con the Other in order to gain mastery over it (Hyldgaard, 2004).

Desire is also desire for what my mOther desires, for what becomes desirable by virtue of being valued by the mOther and desire of that which is (the m)Other in myself, the unconscious, since I could have not emerged as a subject but through symbolic mediation, which is the field of the Other (Neill, 2011; p. 41). Lack and unconscious desire, thus, come to be experienced as extimate, and, as such, threatening.

The earlier mentioned confrontation seems to parallel the traumatic episode of my subjective constitutive split, which allowed for my existence as a subject of language. Seemingly, the scene of the fight acts as a screen memory (Freud, 1899;

passim; Freud, 1918; p. 161) for the mythical moment of the traumatic split between being and meaning. Moreover, the splitting, in my case, seems to have been redoubled by the split between the unconsciously presupposed complete relationship with my mother and the relationship with a lacking third figure, the Other. The perplexing and paradoxical unconscious acknowledgment of the multifold split of my reconstructed 'I' who disavowed lack, motivated this 'I' and future ones to seek refuge in a fantasy of control, which replicates the primal relationship: simplistically, it would appear that I unconsciously conceived of myself as my mother's/the first Other's imaginary phallus, which reduced my father/the second Other to a passive and powerless witness (Verhaeghe, 2004; p. 419-420). This can be seen in the narrative in the succession between my father, religion and science. None of the three instances of the second Other could heal my chronic self-deprecation. Neither religion nor science ever completely erased the traces of the real, and so my fantasy became blocked by the very element it tried to circumvent. I could not/cannot conceive of my own origin (Neill, 2011; p.48), which determined my convoluted fantasy of inexistence. Thus, faced with the question 'What am 'I'?', the 'I' can only speak from the position of the imagined jouissance of the mOther – the retrospectively disavowed loss of (the mother-child) unity (Fink, 1995; p.60).

A number of subjective structural characteristics can be extracted from the exploration of the first anecdote on an intra-individual level through the Discourse of the Master. First, it becomes apparent that I unconsciously perceived myself to be the first Other's, more specifically, my mother's, objet petit a. Second, it can be argued that through my father's intervention, I came to misperceive my mother's desire as being directed towards my inexistence. Third, it seems that the identification with the lack of existence which is assumed to completely satisfy my mother's desire has led to the construction of a very specific form of fantasy of control through which I saw myself as the instrument that can grant my mother complete jouissance under the gaze of a second, powerless other. The emphasis here lies on the need for control.

In what concerns the second anecdote, it appears that the intra-individual dimension is largely dominated by the struggle to disavow the loss of the mythical jouissance, the primal jouissance before the letter, the presupposed lost wholeness, at the expense of the pleasure permitted within and through the symbolic field (Fink, 1995; p. 60; Neill, 2011; p. 49-51). What this second, reconstructed 'I' seems to strive for is the perpetuation of what it has mistaken as the first-order jouissance of my mother for which it considers itself to be instrumental. The scenario presented in the first anecdote seems to be repeated, this time under the gaze of the scientific discourse of evolutionary psychology, which, just as religion before it, fails to break the mother-child dyad and is reduced to a mere passive observer. Presupposed primal jouissance of my mother, symbolically represented by the desire for my inexistence, becomes the core around which the fantasy was woven. There are numerous instances within the text when lack is mentioned: 'hostile emptiness' (line 63), 'I felt that a significant part of me had been cut out' (line 66). It would appear that this lack has replicated the originary choice of lack of being, or that of meaning, which has precipitated myself as a subject in language into (a lack of) existence.

What the numerous replications attest to is my attempt to gain (a sense of) agency: 'the position I was in was, to a great extent, my design, my choice' (line 72).

Here it is useful to turn, once more, to the Freudian framework. Freud presents the case of a boy of eighteen months who repeatedly engaged in the same type of play, the 'Da-fort' game – a staging of the alternation of the appearance and disappearance of objects (Freud, 1922; p.12). Freud argues that the insistence on repeating the series of appearances and disappearances, although implicitly entailing the unpleasant dimension associated with disappearance, confers a degree of mastery to the child (Freud, 1922; p. 14). It is possible that the repetition of the reenactment of my traumatic split has a similar aim – that of attempting to gain mastery over something which is beyond me. Such an endeavour might be motivated by the inconsistency between my narcissistically erected image as my mother's imaginary phallus, which comes to stand for my ideal ego, and the content of this image manifested through the misperception of my mother's desire in the sense of my lack of existence, which becomes my ego ideal. As in Freud's example, it appears that I was trying to replicate the mythical moment of my creation as subject in order to be more deliberately involved in the choice, even if only through the staging of the context (Loose; 2002; p. 222): the trip to a foreign country. It would seem that I was trying to reverse the constitutive forced choice in an act of symbolic death that I unconsciously believed to satisfy my mother's desire: 'I remember equivalating moving away with death' (lines 61-62).

In what concerns the connection of death and melancholia, Leader suggests that melancholics are often split between the world of the dead, lost object which they refuse to let go of, and the world of the living (Leader, 2009; p. 185-199). However, from a more Lacanian-oriented perspective, it could be argued that my melancholic subjective connection with death here was based on a disavowal of loss. Therefore, the melancholic 'I' was in fact attempting to fulfill, and as such to control, the desire of my mother by committing acts that would confer it a desirable status – that of non-existence. Thus, it can be argued that I was torn between the imagined locus of my mother's first-order jouissance and my repeated failure to access the jouissance after the letter in its socially acceptable administration (Loose, 2002; passim) because of the paradoxical fantasy that I had constructed: I unconsciously held the conviction that, on the one hand, I was the instrument through which my mother accessed primal jouissance, but, that on the other hand, my potency lay in my inexistence.

This fantasy transcends the subjective episode presented in the anecdote and it is, perhaps, reinforced through every subjective manifestation. However, returning to the reconstructed 'I' of the anecdote, it seems that it has attempted to redress that impossible position and satisfy the desire of the mother by removing itself from the familiar part of the symbolic matrix in which it had emerged. However, it could not but remain within the symbolic field. All the 'I' did was to exchange the familiar for the new, and this seemed, for a short period of time, to simulate a disappearance of subjectivity: 'in those first few weeks I was mostly absent' (line 80). The imagined complete jouissance of the mother was upheld through the very act of symbolic

death. This idea seems to run counter to Leader's argument that the melancholic's main difficulty in distancing themselves from the lost object resides in the fact that their perspective of their selves is entangled with the image of what they (must have) meant for the object (Leader, 2009; p. 100-199). This would mean that, concomitantly with the object, the individual also loses a part of itself. In Leader's understanding of the analysis of the melancholic structure, the subject tries to assert its agency by 'consenting' to the loss (Leader, 2009; p. 150-156). This consent often takes the form of a self-imposed sacrifice (Leader, 2009; p. 148-149). However, the exploration of this reconstructed subjective moment suggests that, although my image of myself was indeed deeply interwoven with what I must have meant for my mother, I did not perceive myself to have lost the object (a), because I, myself, was the objet petit a. Instead, the imagined loss of existence became my purpose, as this loss would have allowed my memory-reconstructed self to both fulfill and control my mother's desire, and thus to sustain the impossible fantasy. Not only did I seem to consent to the symbolic loss, but I became actively involved in constructing this loss of existence in order to avoid my former passive position. However, at this point, I had failed to transcend my previous role as slave in relation to the mOther, because my own desire remained underdeveloped. Looked at from a different perspective, it seems that, similarly to an addict, I attempted to grant and gain access to the retrospectively posited jouissance before the letter by disregarding the sine qua non condition of the Other on which my existence rested (Loose, 2002; p. 133-283).

On an intra-individual dimension, through the Discourse of the Master, the second anecdote draws attention to two other salient characteristics of my melancholic fantasy: firstly, there is the compulsion to repeat a rigid tripartite scenario with myself on a position of control as my mother's objet petit a in the visual field of a second Other, which here happens to be the discourse of (evolutionary) psychology. Secondly, because of the compulsive nature of the scenario, it can be argued that, up to the point of narration, my motivations remained unconscious, hidden. They appear to have been imposed on myself from without, a fact which determined me to constantly strive for a dominant position by establishing relationships of power. However, paradoxically, I attempted to achieve control by reducing myself to nothing.

On a more socially-oriented, inter-individual plane, the exploration of the first anecdote through the Discourse of the University draws attention to the egocentric view of the Christian dogma, reinforced through the Cartesian conception of the self, which assumes that the human being is the center of all creation. In 'Totem and Taboo', Freud (1918; p. 28-29) offers a potential explanation for the appeal to a higher power. He argues throughout that the adult is the expression of the sum of early experiences, which are heavily marked by the relationship with the caregivers. This relationship, which constitutes the basis for all others, including that with the self, is characterized by emotional ambivalence (Freud, 1918; p. 48-54). In Lacanian terms, it can be argued that the child both loves his/her parents for their caring concern and their potential as first objects of love and hates them for the power they hold over him/her, for the failure to satisfy all his/her wishes and for the obstacle they pose in achieving his/her first sexual object (Fink, 1995; p. 50-59; Loose, 2002; p. 177). The fear of the all-powerful parent produces feelings of hatred, which, being

socially inappropriate, are repressed and converted into manifestations of love, in an attempt to appease the parent's (imagined) wrath (Freud, 1918; p. 211-212). Freud even puts forth his own myth about the primal horde to explain the source of the ambivalence of feeling, the implicit guilt and admiration for the primal father who, in time, acquires the status of totem and later on of god (Freud, 1918; p. 234).

It is interesting to note that in Christianity, God is also referred to as the Holy Father. The appeal to a higher power then tells something about the relationship with the parents. In the subjective moment under analysis, a moment whose structure will have been ceaselessly repeated, the potency of the primary narcissism does not seem to have become diluted through the unconscious confrontation with the desire of my father, perhaps because he had been overpowered by my perception of my mother. I have interpreted the ambivalence characteristic of the relationship with my mother in terms of active and passive roles. While I loved my mother, more so as I still saw myself as part of her, I hated the passive position which was ascribed to me, because it hindered the development of my own desire and jeopardised my privileged role as her imaginary phallus (Verhaeghe, 2004; p. 409). It would seem that the dislike for the passive position is what motivated me to become the active partner (Verhaeghe, 2004; p. 409). However, the ambivalence of feeling was reserved for the privileged relationship with my mother. Contempt is what was left for the external world. While it may appear that, at the memory-reconstructed time of the first anecdote the 'I' was trying to ingratiate this external and extimate world, embodied by God, in order to alleviate the existential angst: 'I tried to follow the Christian guidelines promoted by the Bible, sometimes to absurd lengths' (lines 37-38), it seems more plausible that it, in fact, was trying to co-opt the external as a second Other and point out its lack. Perhaps the choice of a paternal figure was not accidental. In this case it could be seen as a closer semantic connection to the original situation. God becomes the powerless father who cannot create the space for the 'I's desire.

The picture presented above once again points to the intricate connection between the three Lacanian realms, as Christianity is but another discourse that attempts to offer an explanation for the Borromean knot of the symbolic, imaginary and real. Freud himself traces back in history the mark that the constituent narcissism of the human subject has impressed through the symbolic. He identifies what Žižek (2006; p. 6-7) terms the 'three successive humiliations of man': to begin with, Copernicus's discovery that it is the Earth that revolves around the Sun deprives humankind of its central position within the universe; second, Darwin's theory of evolution argues against the idea of humanity being a deliberate, privileged creation, thus reducing humans to successful genetic mutations; lastly, Freud's invention of the unconscious (Parker, 2011; p. 11) points to the primacy of the unconscious, stealing the show from the ego (Žižek, 2006; p. 6-7; Lacan, 1977(a); p. 674-675).

The emphasis on an exterior unconscious, within which the proper subject manifests itself fleetingly, is of utmost importance for this project. It can be said that it is at the level of the exterior unconscious that the extraneous core of the melancholic

subject can be truly unveiled, as it is here that I was and still am confronted with the multifaceted question of desire addressed to the Other and to the self - 'Che vuoi?' (Neill, 2011; p. 42-43). This once more points to the manifold structure of desire. Since desire is always brought about in response to an Other desire, the question of, and to, the Other always entails a danger to the subject (Neill, 2011; p. 43). In this case, the question could be slightly altered to accommodate my particular context to 'How do you want me?'. It exposes my narcissistic disavowal of lack which has skewed my fantasy in such a manner that my sole purpose became the simulation of a lack of existence in order to satisfy the mOther and humiliate the second Other – religion, psychology, imaginary others. Unconsciously, the presupposed primal jouissance of my mother became the embodiment of the answer to the threatening question of and to the Other. To make the connection to Leader's argument and with Freud's portrayal of melancholia, the lost object, and the space of the dead are both synonyms for the imagined first-order jouissance of the first Other. It is perhaps in this sense that Leader's (2011; p.179) idea that melancholics seem to be forced to lead a life of simulacra can be understood. It may also offer a partial response to Freud's (1917; p. 252) dilemma regarding the connection between melancholia and suicide. Living as an in-existent subject in language was the re-enactment of the simulation which could satisfy the misperception of my mother's desire. What I have inferred from this depiction is that, unconsciously, I solely perceived myself as a part of my mother/a first Other and not as a lacking whole, a perception reminiscent of the organic reality of the beginning of my life. The endless struggle for a position of power seems to have led to a high degree of distrust, which is accentuated with each following experience.

Therefore, what the first anecdote reveals from a more socially-oriented perspective through the Discourse of the University is my structurally distrustful nature which seems to have derived from the three-part act of a compulsively repeated scenario.

In terms of the second part of the narrative, the discourse seems to unfold from the psychological framework which the 'I' unconsciously attempts to subdue. There is a shift in the type of discourse cast in the role of the second Other: religion is now replaced by psychology which promises a greater challenge. The case may be that I have actually sensed my unfree, enslaved position and wanted to change the status quo. Nevertheless, it is more likely that the desire to make a change was a consequence of my exposure to different types of discourses as a means of upholding my fantasy, rather than a primal motivation. While it can be said that the discourse of psychology offers at the very least a passageway to a linguistic equation that can carry out the function of the paternal metaphor, psychology falters in that there is nothing outwith language that can act as guarantor for the validity of the clinical criteria (Loose, 2002; p. 208). Psychology stumbles over the very thing that it attempts to study – subjectivity. It insists on adhering to a scientific framework based on the assumption that things and events can be analysed objectively. Consequently, there are a number of shortcomings associated with the assumptions of the scientific method in psychology. Its basic tenets are that the future necessarily resembles the past, that cause and effect can be isolated within an experiment, that a high degree of objectivity can be achieved, that results are generalizable and that

probability of a phenomenon occurring can be calculated on the basis of a representative sample (Coolican, 2009; pp.1-25, 56-77).

Hume (1748; pp. 17-18), however, argues that even consistent experience cannot guarantee that two phenomena will be conjoined again at a future point in time, because such a belief only takes into account one of the terms, namely the past experience (which already implies a subject), disregarding the impenetrability of the future. Moreover, there is no feature in the external world that would objectively attest to the connection between cause and effect; the only thing observable is that one event follows another (Hume, 1748; pp. 12-14). The leap towards a causal connection is made through and in the mind (Hume, 1748; pp.12-14), which is in itself a subjective construction. Thus, it can be inferred that subjectivity imbues all and every observational or analytical endeavour. Consequently, it can be argued that psychological research, which relies heavily on seemingly objective statistical measurement leads to a variant of the fallacy of composition (Simonton, 1997). Furthermore, probability, on which generalisations in psychology are usually propped, can only be established within the context of a totality. But, since the mind, as the object of study, is considered to be at least partially unknown, probability cannot be adequately applied in the exploration of psychological phenomena (Loose, 2002; p. 228). In the preceding section, the mind has already been mentioned twice, in two different positions (perhaps a self-imposed attempt at another split) – as being both the subject orchestrating the research and the object of research - division which draws attention to the underlying difficulty of conducting research in psychology and emphasises the all-pervading character of subjectivity, which cannot be dispelled through the use of statistics and impersonal pronouns. Research cannot be divorced from the notion of subjective choice, desire (Lacan, 1957; p. 429).

It is perhaps interesting to note here that the arguments against the scientific view of psychology, however justified, reinforce the repetition of my compulsive scenario: psychology cannot create the space for the proper development of my desire. It is but another helpless onlooker whose impotence is imposed through logical arguments. Moreover this point of the analysis signals a conjunction between the structures of three subjective moments: the reconstructed subject of the anecdote, the subject of the narrator and the 'I' of the analyst. All three moments seem to aim towards the same goal – the reduction of the second Other to a powerless participant. However, in this case, I cannot render psychology completely impotent, as it is partly the means through which I have devised this fantasy in the form of an analysis in order to explain the structure of my fantasy. Moreover, it has introduced me, through the mediation of imaginary others, to a set of symbolic equations through which I can make cohesive connections between the structural elements of what I have come to interpret as my fantasy and components of other fantasies. Thus, in attempting to understand and, most importantly, to reconstruct my experience through a Lacanian prism, a perspective made up of a cumulative series of reinterpretations of misinterpretations of Lacan's message, I have generated an explanation that permits the displacement of my desire. In other words, this analysis serves as an imperfect integration of the real as both the cause of subjectivity and the location of the impossible primal jouissance into the symbolic. Perhaps my affinity to this research method has to do with the paradoxical nature of the concepts

on which it is based, a characteristic that resembles the nature of my fantasy. In this sense, a good example is the notion of the Lacanian real, which, although it refers to that which cannot be symbolised, is still marked in language through a signifier (“the real”). Similarly, I was and perhaps still am upholding my fantasy by simulating an imaginary lack of existence that was/is nevertheless accompanied by an imaginary-symbolic existence.

From the analysis of the inter-individual interaction of the second anecdote it can be concluded that while I have maintained the same subjective structure throughout, the possibility of transcending the impossible position is beginning to take shape. The acknowledgment of the compulsory pattern of the rigid fantasy is now actively constructed and manifested in the desire to conduct self-analysis.

Although in the preceding section the intra- and inter- individual aspects and the different subjective moments have been kept partially separate, it is now time to focus on their multidirectional interaction as it is outlined by the Discourse of the Hysteric. The analysis brings forth four subjective episodes: chronologically, first comes the 'I' recollecting and reconstructing the two 'Is' believed to have experienced the fight between the parents and the trip to Canada; lastly, but perhaps most prominently, comes the 'I' of the analyst, that is, myself as the person writing down this convoluted explanatory fantasy for the newly acknowledged lack and its relationship with the lack of others. In a movement akin to that of the Hegelian slave, I have begun to perceive the paradox of my fantasy in the things that I have unconsciously shaped while labouring under the reign of the master, the misperception of the first Other's desire, and in the view of the second Other(s). Among the objects authored along the way are the ego, misperceptions of the parental and cultural superego and the ideal ego through whose construction the subjective function of the ego ideal emerged. The common denominator of all these is crystallised in the realisation that the misperception of the first Other's desire has blocked the development of my own desire and threatened me with death, as only through my non-existence I could retain my status as my mother's proper objet petit a. Therefore, this misperception brought me in a position where I was confronted with both the severe restriction in the administration of phallic jouissance and with the lethal potential of primal jouissance. If I misperceived my mother's desire to be for my inexistence, then my existence, regardless of how much it tried to simulate non-existence, was superfluous and contradicted the very purpose it set to achieve – that of being my mother's objet petit a. This has generated a chronic discontentment with life, which, however unpleasant, has motivated me to seek something that would destabilise this status quo. I found the means to achieve this, after repeated exposure to second Others, in the field of Lacanian psychoanalysis which provides enough flexibility so as to allow me to construct knowledge about myself through self-analysis.

The knowledge generated is that only suspected at the moment of narration and more clearly delineated through analysis. Explicitly, this newly constructed knowledge consists of the collection of subjective characteristics revealed through the exploration of the interactional character of my identity, features which have led



me to recognise my subjective clinical structure as perverse. It is essential to mention that perversion is not to be understood here as equivalent to the concept of aggressive deviant sexuality, but should be seen as the structural position of the subject in respect to the first and second Others, lack and law (Verhaeghe, 2004; p. 420). Therefore, in terms of perversion, I seem to have placed, to an extent, the responsibility for my existence on the Other (Neill, 2011; p. 108). This appears to have echoed my unconscious desire to be my mother's and by extension, through the subjective movement entailed in the ego ideal, the Other's objet petit a. I seem to have placed, at least partially, the object (a) in the position of cause and unconsciously seen myself as the object to be enjoyed: (a  $\diamond$ \$) (Neill, 2011; p. 69 N). The exploration of fantasy also shows that I, occasionally, unconsciously attempted to refuse the lack provoked by the loss of real jouissance by retaining a specific type of jouissance in relation to the second Other crystallised as an object (Loose, 2002; p. 216). In my unconscious scenario, this second Other had to be reduced to a passive position in order to fit into my rigid fantasy. Hylgaard (2004) argues that the perverse subject submits to the motto 'The Lord's will be done'. In the context of this analysis, the place of the Lord is inhabited by the first Other. The 'Lord's will' here can be interpreted as the enunciation, through the filter of the father's figure, of my mother's desire in regards to the reconstructed 'I' of the recollection: 'I desire your inexistence'. This will was carried out over and over again through the ego ideal in my fantasy and is most obvious in my self-accusations at different subjective moments: 'there was something wrong with me' (lines 29-30), 'the conviction that there was/is something wrong with me' (line 51). While anxiety and guilt are seldom expressed in perversion (Loose, 2002; p. 216), the content of the misperception of my mother's desire – my non-existence – guarantees the manifestation of such elements in this case. The anxiety-ridden question addressed to and by the other/Other (Loose, 2002; p. 216): 'What does he mean?' (line 17) becomes pivotal here since its answer has shaped my fantasy.

It is useful to make a parallel with Leader's argument that melancholics' existence is split between the world of the dead, a place of solitude, and the world of the living (Leader, 2009; p. 174), thus placing them in the impossible situation of being in two places at once (Leader, 2009; p. 187). The impossible character of such a position seems to be true for my subjective response here as well, both at the moment of witnessing my parents' fight and in the episode of the journey to Canada. However, the explanation for this state may be somewhat different than that proposed by Leader. It appears that this paradoxical position was brought about by my disavowal of lack in myself and in the first Other and not by an anguishing abstract loss as Freud (1917; p. 244-245) and Leader (2009; p.172-185) propose. I did seem to identify myself more with the world of the dead, but I did so as a result of the narcissistic conviction that I myself was the first Other's objet petit a, the instrument for its total jouissance. Consequently, my existence was redoubled: while on the one hand I seem to have been a conventional character who followed the rules, on a private, unconscious level I had perpetually been reconstructing a rigid scenario that transgresses the (Oedipal) law (Verhaeghe, 2004; p. 423). The connection between these two worlds seemed to lack to a great extent, as before the analysis I did not understand what sustained my melancholic fantasy. Therefore, the need for knowledge can be interpreted not only as the manifestation of my taunting

in order to emphasise the lack in the Other, but also my unconscious attempt at transcending my impossible situation and accepting phallic jouissance.

Verhaeghe (2004; p. 405) identifies three characteristics of the perverse subject: it replicates a rigid scenario (1), which is compulsively repeated (2) in order to ensure that the subject is in an active, powerful role (3). Within this fantasy, the subject misidentifies itself with the first Other's objet petit a (Verhaeghe, 2004; p. 417). This initial characterisation is then followed through into more depth, thus emphasising the perpetually subdued position of the subject, who, unable to grasp its own traumatic motivation becomes chronically distrustful (Verhaeghe, 2004; p. 206). Many of these features can be observed in the subjective moments that are the object of this analysis: (1) my identification with my mother's objet petit a, which, paradoxically, could only be (2) instrumental to her enjoyment and to my empowerment by my non-existence. A third element can be observed – the father, God, science, who, in this scenario, were rendered impotent witnesses after failing to create the space for the development of my desire. The tendency to repeat this tripartite scenario attests to its compulsory nature and to the extimate, unconscious motivation that fueled it. Some of the most consistent features that have transpired through analysis are my unfree unconscious position and the lack of trust that has unfolded from my relationship with the first Other, which simultaneously caused a radical split and 'redoubling' (Verhaeghe, 2004; p. 423) of my reality. The mechanism that facilitates this 'redoubling of reality' (Verhaeghe, 2004; p. 423) is the disavowal of my own structural lack and that of the first Other, which led, yet again, to a paradoxical position: I have aimed at becoming the object of the Other's complete enjoyment but without ever submitting to the Other's rules (Verhaeghe, 2004; p. 411, 419). It appears that the different steps of the analysis gradually unveil an image of my subjective structure which corresponds to the perverse structural position outlined by Verhaeghe. From this analysis, therefore, it can be said that my self-perceived melancholic identity is a consequence of my narcissistically perverse structure, which has placed me in the impossible position of seeing myself as my mother's imaginary phallus which can only satisfy her desire through its non-existence. The core of my subjective position is extraneous, as it is imposed through the maternal superego and constituted by my misperception of my mother's desire.

Even the motivation to conduct this analysis may be partially seen as another manifestation of my structurally perverse position. Verhaeghe (2004; p. 422) argues that, because of the refusal of the Oedipal law and the imposition of its own 'superior' law, the perverse subject conceives of the Other/others as inferior. Since they are in a lowlier position, the symbolic Other and imaginary others are challenged and confined to the role of the powerless onlooker. However, in my case, the interaction with different types of discourses and various others in the role of the second Other did not remain without consequences. Moreover, my unknown source of compulsive dissatisfaction with existence has driven me to search for help. Perhaps I have, through the displacement of the secondary Other, attempted not only to impose a lesson on this Other, but also to find a powerful enough Other that can carry out the function of the paternal figure. Nevertheless, because of the successive 'humiliation' of the father, of God and of science, the analysis seems to suggest that I have largely disregarded external help. It can be speculated that, because of my unconscious need to always be in relationships of power, I have come to regard

myself as the expert (in enjoyment). As a consequence, a potential analyst would most probably have been seen as the 'other-supposed-to-enjoy', or as a passive witness and not as a guide (Verhaeghe, 2004; p. 421). However, in the case under scrutiny, there is an interesting temporal and structural overlap of roles: there are at least two subjective moments when I as analysand address myself as analyst, as 'expert'. This may be evidence of my hermetical self-perspective and of the distrust that seems to be so characteristic of perversion. It also portrays the radical extent of my unconscious subjective splitting. In looking for help, ultimately, I have addressed myself as expert. But I did so in the realm of the symbolic, a field that is contingent on the notion of trans-subjectivity. Here, symbolic bridges can be constructed between the two worlds of my assumed perverse subjective position through which the dialectisation of desire can proceed. This is the point where theory and lived experience are brought together by 'demand(ing) that theory test itself against the uncanny details of the story' (Gallop, 2002; p. 11) and thus the possibility for something to happen at the ethically traced intersection of the individual with the social, of the internal with the external is created (Gallop, 2002; p. 156-158; Bayly & Baraitser, 2008).

Another possible explanation for the desire to conduct self-analysis is that I could no longer uphold such a paradoxical fantasy, reason for which I have myself attempted to become the second Other that would make room for my desire. Yet another possibility is that, by becoming the analyst of my own past experiences, I have further emphasised my structural split through the attempt to presently dominate my reconstruction of my past subjective manifestations. In other words, I have repeated the perverse scenario by placing my reconstructed former selves in the place of the second Other. Such an act involves another transgression, besides that of the Oedipal law inherent in perversion. Gallop (1979; p. 47), in discussing the matter of the Freudian understanding of the responsibility of the psychoanalyst, argues that the analyst can only fulfill his/her role as guide and maintain his/her innocence by making sure, through remuneration, that he/she does not follow their wishes. That is to say, that "by doing it for money, not love, by prostituting himself, the analyst buys his innocence" (Gallop, 1979; p. 47). However, in this case, because I am both the analysand and the analyst, there can be no other wishes to follow but my own, and, consequently, no room for such innocence. The social contract has been, once again, violated.

The variety of potentialities in interpreting subjective responses brings to the fore the fact that any such explanations are but fantasies themselves as well. They are telling about how the subject relates to lack and, consequently, how it partakes of different types of enjoyment (Neill, 2011; p. 42-43). However, the notion of interpretation already implies a subject who unavoidably distorts the meaning it encounters (Neill, 2013; p. 3-4). In analysing my own experiences, I have once again altered and incorporated them into my fantasy; I have misrecognised myself anew in the reflective gaze of the mOther. The analysis per se is a form of relating to my own structural lack and thus, another manifestation of the fantasy. What has resulted from this exploration probably speaks more about the analyst than about the narrative (Hook, 2013; p. 51). However, the question of who this analyst may be remains open, for the answer changes with every reading. While the project is

intended to be my analysis of my narrative, the moment it is crystallised in a final written form it becomes a piece to be analysed itself, perhaps not only by myself, but by others as well. It can, therefore, be said that self-analysis is doubly impossible: first because it relies on the altering encounter with the all-pervasive discourse outwith the subject cannot exist and second, because the existence of a subject already entails a fantasy (Neill, 2013; p. 3-4). My explanations, then, are not explanations at all in the proper sense, but a portrayal of fantasmatic relationships between different subjective moments, imaginary others and the misperceptions they have facilitated and knowledge. However, this is not to say that conducting self-analysis should be abandoned. On the contrary, I believe that self-analysis is important precisely because it allows for versatility in explanations and for the possibility of fighting for meaning (Neill, 2013; p. 3).

While, at times, I have proposed multiple interpretations for the same element of the fantasy, interpretations which are, however, by no means exhaustive, they should not be seen as mutually exclusive or infinitely relativistic, as this would lead to a form of nihilism that runs contrary to the purpose of this work (Neill; 2013; p. 3). Instead, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the lateral proliferation (Hook, 2013; p. 53) of a number of explanations for various subjective moments facilitates the dislocation of the fantasy from its original axis. By fantasy I refer here not only to my own but also to the fantasy of understanding and mastery, which so often comes to result from the idealisation of psychoanalysis and psychology (Lacan, 1992 as cited in Hook & Neill, 2008; p. 7-8). The prominence of my argument about melancholic fantasy as a manifestation of my subjective position as structurally perverse within the structure of the project is only the result of spatial constraints and should not be seen as an attempt at a definitive answer. It is, rather, an echo of another lateral signification which aims at establishing and extending the relationships between signifiers. Therefore, it is perhaps wiser to withhold from formulating definitive answers, which would only isolate meaning, and focus on producing relevant questions that would permit a growth of connections between signifiers, thus ensuring the perpetual displacement of desire (Verhaeghe, 1998, p. 104).

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