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The Sublime in Lacanian Theory: Split Subjectivity and its Tragic Action

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Abstract: This paper analyses the Lacanian sublime resulting from the encounter between the $\$$ (split subject) and the object a according to Lacan's fantasy formula ($\$ \diamond a$). While the sublime in tragedy has been interpreted by several philosophers throughout the ages, in Lacan's view the inevitable destiny that tragedy presents stems from the inner structure of the subject, which demonstrates the subject's split and incompleteness. Whether it is Antigone or Hamlet, they are often confronted with an ambivalent structure within the subject, which they try to find relief from, but ultimately find it difficult to escape the impasse. The subject is unable to fully unify the contradiction between the unconscious and the ego; it moves towards a split. This split subject is bound to fail when it encounters the object a , which is the Lacanian sublime. The Lacanian sublime embodies a kind of impossibility, and the subject, facing it, suffers an "absolute failure". But precisely because of the sublime, the subject's failure is precisely what brings it into contact with new possibilities, with a real revolution.

Keywords: Subject; Split; Tragedy; Sublime

In the world of thought, tragedy has traditionally been treated as the highest form of art. Both Aristotle and Hegel have placed it among the highest spiritual patterns of the human spiritual world. In psychoanalysis, psychoanalysts such as Lacan and Freud also favoured tragedy. Freud introduced the Oedipus complex, placing it at the centre of his theory. Lacan borrowed from tragedies such as Antigone and Hamlet to elaborate and expand on concepts such as desire and the subject. Why do these psychoanalysts favour tragedy so much? Lacan may have an answer for us: "In an even more fundamental way than through the connection to the Oedipus complex, tragedy is at the root of our experience, as the key word 'catharsis' implies."^[1] Although Lacan's "our experience" refers to the "experience of the psychoanalyst", his analysis of Antigone actually points to the isomorphism between the subject and tragedy, i.e., the problems reflected in tragedy and the subject's existential situation are consistent. The spiritual problems and phenomena faced by the subject find their counterparts in tragedy.

1. The Sublime in Tragedy

The sublime has been one of the most important concepts in the development of Western aesthetics and is often seen as a key theme and element of tragedy. It is often opposed to beauty and aesthetic enjoyment. It emphasises the emotional experience of awe, shock, or even fear that the viewer experiences when confronted with something great, unknowable, or beyond himself, and experiences a transcendence in the midst of this emotion or after overcoming an obstacle. The concept of the sublime is of course ambiguous, and since Longinus's *On the Sublime* was translated into French, European scholars have since developed different perspectives on the sublime.

Longinus believed that the sublime had five key components: solemn greatness of thought, impassioned enthusiasm, rhetorical flourishes, elegant phrasing, and a dignified and refined structure. In the context of contemporary hermeneutics, the understanding and discovery of Longinus' concept of the sublime has become a reinterpretation of the sublime by modern thinkers in the wave of history. And this understanding of the sublime reveals precisely a modernity - the human sublime - the passion and thought that are human passions and thoughts, the spiritual endowment of man. Unlike Aristotle's definition of tragedy - catharsis, the experience of ecstasy through a kind of drunken god-like ecstasy, followed by inner peace and spiritual health. Longinus preferred to understand tragedy as an understanding of the kernel of its thoughts and passions through those elegant phrases, structures, and phrasing that make one's own soul greater and more stirring, rising to the heights of nature.

Longinus's sublime captures the qualities of modernity, and its rediscovery and reinterpretation by post-seventeenth-century philosophers and thinkers is the very embodiment of the birth and development of modernity. Burke adds the negative emotional dimension of man to the sublime. Burke believes that when one is confronted with horror but not exposed to it, one has a great sense of celebration as a bystander. In tragedy, the sublime is realised by portraying the virtues and ambitions of the hero and placing him in a situation where he suffers pain and

misfortune. The spectator, as an onlooker, witnesses this situation and has a powerful emotional experience - fear in the face of a grand, heavy scene, but gratitude that the protagonist is not himself, and peace as the event fades away.

When Kant wrote *On the Sense of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, he was deeply influenced by Burke, an aesthetic position based on the senses. But in the *Critique of Judgement* it completely abandoned Burke's position and turned to the rational transcendentalism. Kant points out the definition of the sublime: "The Sublime may be described in this way: It is an object (of nature) the representation [Vorstellung] of which determines the mind to regard the elevation of nature beyond our reach as equivalent to a presentation [Darstellung] of ideas."^[2] But Kant doesn't stop there; Joan Copjec argues that Kant reintroduced the subject into aesthetics at a time when the field of aesthetics generally excluded the subject. "But while others excluded the subject in order the better to affect him/her, in order to attain the maximum emotional effect, Kant completely revolutionized aesthetic theory by excluding the subject in order to protect him/her - in order to hold onto the subject as free. This he did by defining the beautiful object as one that could not be subsumed under any determinate concept, as one about which we could not say all. Kant thus made the beautiful the signifier of a limit, a barrier against the real. With this the object *a*, the nothing that guarantees the subject's freedom, was prohibited from being spoken - and thus from being lost."^[3] The same is true of the sublime, Kant clarified the sublime object and pointed out that the subject faces the sublime object and produces a sense of the sublime, and this sense of the sublime, although relative to the sublime object is limited, impotent, but the subject relies on its own rationality to grasp the world and get rid of the object's constraints, which precisely shows the freedom of human beings. Kant's revolution has also taken place in the field of aesthetics, where tragedy and the subject seem to have formed a subtle link. Situating Kant's interpretation within tragedy - the sublime lies precisely in the fact that the protagonists are confronted with objects that are ungraspable (fate, god-laws, etc.) and that they use their reason to resist these irresistible objects. The success or failure of the protagonists of a tragedy is irrelevant; what matters is the courage and inhibitions they display. The sense of nobility that the audience develops in the face of these uncontradictable situations leads them to a higher moral ground and freedom.

The sublime in the context of modernity, whether Burke or Kant, affirms human subjectivity and exalts human reason. But the rationality of the Enlightenment does not lead us to the other side of the ideal, and the exclusion of the individual by the rational organisation of society intensifies. Huge historical crises such as World War II have shattered people's faith in reason, and people are beginning to look again at the legitimacy of the discourses of rationalism and anthropocentrism brought about by the Enlightenment. The sublime is also faced with deconstruction and reconstruction in this context, which has been discussed by philosophers such as Derrida, Lyotard, Deleuze, and Hayden White, and these discussions invariably point to an important quality - the sublime is "unrepresentable". This points to a key question - since the sublime is "unrepresentable", and in the usual discourse the sublime can be presented by tragedy, what is the relationship between the sublime and tragedy? Of course this question is not necessarily one we are bound to face, but perhaps we can adopt Hölderlin's insistence in poetics that "It is infinite undescriptive (what we call 'sublime') that contributes to tragedy."^[4] It is the indescribability of the infinite (what we call the "sublime") that contributes to tragedy", which would imply that the sublime and tragedy are equivalent in this sense. In such an exploration, the sublime presents us with a new orientation, which is linked to the concepts of transgression, illusion and nothingness in the discourses of philosophers such as Lyotard and Žižek.

2. The paradox of the Lacanian sublime

Lacan is in a key position in many discourses on the sublime. With his dual role as structuralist and post-structuralist, he has influenced the philosophical giants of the postmodern era. At the same time, faced with many events in the social and political sphere - Nazism, the war, the May Storm, etc. - Lacan attempted to try to recapture, through his theory of the subject, the key elements of Freud's spiritual revolution that had been repressed by instrumental rationality, and the psychoanalytic theories that he elaborated explicitly emphasised the existence of a His psychoanalytic theories clearly emphasise the existence of the "tragic" in the human condition, and the Lacanian sublime is born out of this "tragic".

It is easy to see from Lacan's fantasy formula ($\$ \diamond a$) that the sublime emerges from the encounter of the "barred subject" with the object *a*. The notion of "subject" undergoes many transformations at different stages of Lacanian thought, but the distinction between the subject and the ego is always present throughout Lacanian philosophy - the ego belongs to the imaginary order, the subject to the symbolic order. Thus the subject is an unconscious subject and subjective consciousness is merely an illusion produced by the ego. Lacan argues that Freud's *The Ego and the Id* was written precisely to point out the fundamental distinction between the unconscious subject and the ego - the ego is constituted in the unconscious subject through misrecognition. Lacan's use of the symbol *S* for subject is identical to Freud's "Es" (it-ego), implying that for Lacan the unconscious subject is the real subject. In 1957, Lacan created the $\$$, the so-called "barred subject", to indicate that the subject is split.

After 1950, Saussure's linguistics had a profound influence on Lacan, who distinguished between the subject of the statement and the subject of the enunciation. The distinction between the enunciation and the statement lies in the fact that the enunciation refers to the action itself of the speaker who performs the act of speaking, whereas the statement refers to the content of the speech of the speaker who performs the act of speaking. Lacan emphasises that the statement itself carries an a priori meaning, even if the statement is nothing, the statement first points to an object. This means, then, that the subject and the self are identical, that is to say, when we say "I think", "I" am a subject of the statement. Whereas the enunciation subject and the unconscious subject are identical, for Lacan the able subject is more fundamental, the able subject, in order to be able to know itself, given a coherent object, has to perceive it in its completeness, without ever having touched it.

Through the constantly recurring mirror stages of identification and recovery, the enunciation subject constructs a history of the self. But the enunciation subject does not produce language; it is structured by language. The process by which language structures the subject is the process by which the subject symbolises or enters the symbolic order. So in this process the subject is necessarily emasculated, as well as split. This split cannot be healed in any sense, it indicates the impossibility of a complete self-consciousness, the subject will never fully know itself, and this is the reason why man is always in constant doubt about himself. The subtlety of the paradox of "I am lying" lies in the split between the act of speaking and the content of speaking, in which the subject is transformed by the speaking while performing the act of speaking. Whether or not the content is meaningful, the act of speaking itself transcends what the content is intended to express. Lacan's conception of the movement of the subject is not static, but is in a constant state of movement. The subject is constantly thrown into the world, emasculated by language but never completely emasculated, because there is always a rupture beyond language. "The subject, confronted with the enigma of the desire of the Other, tries to verbalise this desire and thus constitutes itself by identifying with the signifiers in the field of the Other, without ever succeeding in filling the gap between subject and Other. Hence, the continuous movement from signifier to signifier, in which the subject alternately appears and disappears."^[5]In the same way that we can use abstract words to identify ourselves, the subject disappears as soon as these abstract words are spoken. At the same time, no matter how many abstract words we use to identify ourselves, we can never answer the question, "Who am I?" This is the question. This is what is known as the fracture of language or the incompleteness of the symbolic order, which also seems to foreshadow the transcendence of the subject itself. In tragedy, the protagonist usually experiences the frustration of will, the oppression of fate and the loss of self-consciousness, etc., the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the statement charge each other, and the protagonist feels powerless, lost and perplexed, and the tragedy is born in this moment. Oedipus is a typical image. In Oedipus Rex, "Oedipus", which is constructed by the "oracle", is a typical described subject. What "Oedipus" does is shaped by language and culture, the definition and interpretation of the subject by the Other. The subject of the enunciation emerges in the process of his constant resistance to the so-called "oracle". Both when Oedipus learnt of the oracle - patricide and matricide - and until the oracle was fulfilled, even though the Thebans still loved him, he chose to leave. These are the moments when the subject of the enunciation triumphs over the subject of the statement. In Lacan's view, the subject's entry into the realm of the symbolic inevitably produces this split, and this split is what makes the subject tragic. Lacan also states the essence of tragedy in his commentary on Antigone "Antigone chooses to be purely and simply the guardian of the being of the criminal as such.....It is because the community refuses this that Antigone is required to sacrifice her own being in order to maintain that essential being which is the family Atè, and that is the theme or true axis on which the whole tragedy turns. Antigone perpetuates, eternalizes, immortalizes that Atè. "^[1]

Where is the support for this split subject? In Lacan's view it is illusion. In The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis Lacan illustrates the illusion as a support for the split subject through the paradox of Zhuang Zi's Dreaming of Becoming a Butterfly. The splitting of the subject is a necessity; if the subject is a whole being, then two scenarios would arise, that is, the subject can only be Zhuang Zi or the subject can only be a butterfly. If the subject is Zhuang Zi, it means the complete alienation of the subject, and Zhuang Zi represents the subject's semiotic identity in the society, which is provided and constructed by the Other, and finally the subject becomes a kind of empty existence, and all of its contents come from the Other, which is "nothing" itself. ". If the subject is a butterfly, in this case the subject seems to be in an unemasculated state, it exists in the real order of desire, and in the network of relations in which it is situated, it is in the position of the "non-person". It is precisely because of the illusion that the subject is no longer merely Zhuang Zi or a butterfly, but only by recognising that he is both Zhuang Zi and a butterfly can he break through this illusion and "see his nature". For Lacan, this means that "In the symbolic reality he was Zhuang Zi, but in the Real of his desire he was a butterfly. Being a butterfly was the whole consistency of his positive being outside the symbolic network. "^[2] Isn't Oedipus in just such a scenario? Is he a hero who saves the Thebes, a sinner who kills his father and marries his mother, or a disillusioned man in self-imposed exile. The visions of "oracles" and words intervene in the interface of Oedipus' subject, leading to a constant change in his perception of the self, and the cracks of the subject fracture into an abyss under the questioning of fate again and again, as he is both the hero who saves the city of Thebes and the sinner who marries his father and his mother.

3. Towards a sublime act of tragedy

Under the auspices of illusion, the "barred subject" encounters object a. The subject projects its desire on object a, but its pursuit of object a is impossible, and the sense of loss and transcendence experienced by the subject in the process is precisely the sublime. It is because of this impossibility that the subject and tragedy are united in this respect; the subject, while recognising that the pursuit of object a is an inevitable failure, is also confronted with the toppling of illusion, and the contradiction between the real and the desirable is a kind of eternal loss. So not only is the subject a tragedy, but the genesis of the subject is also a tragedy.

In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan states that "The sublime object is 'an object elevated to the level of das Ding'."^[2] When we are confronted with the sublime object, we are bound to feel a complex emotion, the sublime. The subject's split is laid bare to us when confronted with the sublime. The sense of the sublime is a reproduction of the sublime, but like any reproduction of experience in relation to the object of experience, which is inadequate, the reproduction of the sublime is an impossibility. The inevitable consequence of the subject's pursuit of the sublime is the experience of its own incompleteness, but also the realisation of a true infinity and transcendence, the sublime transcending "every possible phenomenal, empirical experience". Herein lies the subject's dilemma; the dimension of infinity evokes the sublime, but when the subject tries to reproduce this infinity, all efforts are futile, and "failure in its purest form occurs." "I am born at the end of my life, but I know at the end of my life, and to follow the end of my life with the end of my life is perilous" In Zhuangzi's case, knowledge is treated as a kind of infinity, it is a sublime object, while the subject is finite, and the finite subject is inevitably headed for failure when confronted with the infinite knowledge. Zhuangzi is concerned with the fact that this inevitable failure is exactly what the subject has to face, but Zhuangzi believes that man should stop at this inevitable failure. Lacan turns to a different path, arguing that this experience of failure is what can enable the subject to access experiences beyond phenomena and experience. Antigone, as the split subject, transgresses *l'Atè* in a negative way and takes on the dimension of the sublime. To understand this, it is first necessary to understand Lacan's two kinds of death, one death in the physical sense and the other in the symbolic sense. The latter kind of death is based on language, which carries the subject's existence, his social relations, emotions, etc., which cannot be conceived outside of language. Creon achieves the judgement of Antigone's death in the symbolic order by confining him to a closed chamber. It is here that Antigone comes into contact with the sublime dimension, between life and death, and is able to approach life, experience it, and reflect on it. Žižek relates this to dialectics "the final Goal is not inscribed in the beginning; things receive their meaning afterwards; the sudden creation of an Order confers backward signification on to the preceding Chaos."^[2] Through his desire for "death", Antigone transcends the boundary between the two kinds of death, arrives at the dimension of the sublime, and inscribes himself forever in this realm, reconstructing it. And this dimension of the sublime is in fact an empty space, which needs to be constructed by the subject. The logic of the sublime, then, lies in the realisation that the sublime does not exist, and thus in the reproduction of the sublime.

Lacan states, "Its practice is only a preliminary to moral action as such - the so-called action being the one through which we enter the real."^[1] This is the process of sublimation, i.e., through moral action, not only does one confirm one's own presence, but also gives a new meaning to the original symbolic order, elevating an ordinary object of everyday life to the position of the ineffable object a. Here Lacan and Kant strike a wonderful alliance, in that the realm of the real becomes empty after man enters the symbolic order, the symbolic overrides the real, and the identity with which the subject can identify is constructed entirely by the symbolic order (you are a man or you are a Chinese, etc.). The pre-linguistic subject is in constant confrontation with the identity constructed by the symbolic order, creating a split between the ego and the unconscious subject, and Kant's self-discipline relies on the moral action of the rational subject in its struggle with the other. But Lacan is at a more radical level. Wu Champion points out that "Lacan replaces Kant's pure practical reason with the pure death-drive of the same "reasonable" desires as Freud's, thus making the radical impossibility, which is not formally recognised in Kant's system, into a moral-political one. possibility, becomes the only requirement for the moral-political event of choosing suicide under the death drive to create the possible out of the impossible."^[6] Whereas Creon stops at the dimension of the good, Antigone follows her desire to display beauty that is difficult to look at, and even arrives at the dimension of the real. That is the world of death and impossibility, where tragedy occurs and the sublime unfolds. Perhaps now we can answer the question, "What is the relationship between tragedy and the sublime?" --The sublime is tragedy, and the sublime can only be achieved through the action of a split subject, and both the subject and the action are a tragedy.

4. Conclusion

In any case, Lacan's interpretation of tragedy and the sublime gives us the truth at the level of the subject: only in the face of absolute failure can one, like Oedipus who becomes blind on his own initiative, and like Antigone who seeks the "second death" withdraw oneself from the symbolic world and thus move towards the sublime. Like Antigone in her quest for the "second death", she withdraws herself from

the world of symbols and moves towards a real action that does not serve the good, but contains the tragic experience of life. "Actions are inscribed in the space of tragedy, and it is with relation to this space, too, that we are led to take our bearings in the sphere of values." ^[1], "It is said that tragedy is an action. and what one finds at the end when one turns the whole thing around may appear in different ways." ^[1] In action the subject is able to realise the reproduction of the sublime through retrospective construction.

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