

Unary Trait:

Some Consideration on Mr. Know-all and Other Stories Sharing Common Threads

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First of all, I am interested in comparing "Mr. Know-All" with "The Purloined Letter" by Edgar Allan Poe, exploring again the use of Lacan of the latter to analyze the relationship between the symbolic, the real, and the imaginary. Note that the King and Ramsey (the jealous husband of the lady) are both comparable to the Real in the sense that they "*should not know*" which is the same to say that they cannot enter into symbolic relations. This is literally how the Real functions in the first place. "*It should never know of us!*"

The King and Ramsey as comparable to the Real, as they are depicted as individuals who should not, or perhaps cannot, fully engage in the symbolic realm.

Although the King and Ramsey in "Mr. Know-All" both represent authority and power, however, they might be seen as a character confined to the Real in Lacanian terms: barred from symbolic relations. In Poe's story, the King's role is constrained by royal protocol and political obligations, which limit his personal agency and engagement in everyday social interactions. His role as a symbol of power is primarily bound by the symbolic order itself. This shows that if we bend and fold the symbolic enough on itself, it can even yield to Real of the symbolic order. Ramsey, who is jealous of Mr. Kelada's interactions with his wife, can also be viewed as a character trapped in this virtual Real. His jealousy and insecurity prevent him from effectively engaging with the symbolic realm of trust, communication, and ... understanding. However at the end, he spits a letter out giving the money back to say "I am not entrapped anymore as I know!"

In contrast to Ramsey, Mr. Kelada's character embodies the ability to participate in the deeper layers of symbolic order. The story explores the tensions and conflicts that arise when characters from different realms - the virtual Real and the Symbolic - interact and attempt to communicate. The King's (in Poe's story)/Ramsey's inability to fully participate in the symbolic order contributes to the story's central conflict.

The wife is imaginary: Why should she wear the expensive necklace in front of a verse jeweler like Mr. Kelada? The relationship and complot between these two is plausible. The wife's decision to wear an expensive necklace can be interpreted as a desire to project a certain image or fantasy of herself: "*I (am) like you, I am a betrayer/magician/... too!*". She may want to provoke Mr. Kelada's admiration. This can be viewed as an attempt to construct a specific self-image in the presence of an attractive and charismatic figure like Mr. Kelada. This might hint at underlying phantasy relations or potential intrigue. Her actions could be driven by a desire for attention, admiration, or even jealousy, especially given the jealousy and insecurity displayed by her husband, Ramsey. This creates a complex dynamic in which the wife and Mr. Kelada engage in an unspoken, symbolic struggle for attention and power.

in the film version of the story, Kelada sees the face of the woman in the mirror and knows the truth. This is comparable to the mirror stage in which the symbolic and imaginary relations meet each other and recognize each other. Now here the relations are balanced again: Kelada takes the position of imaginary and the woman the symbolic and they go into a pact: magic of betrayal as mutual understanding.

In the mirror stage, an infant recognizes themselves in a mirror and forms a sense of identity, but it's a dual experience of both the image (imaginary) and the understanding of self within a symbolic framework. In the film version, **Mr. Kelada's glimpse of the woman's face in the mirror serves as a pivotal moment where symbolic and imaginary relations converge.** The mirror scene and Mr. Kelada's realization suggest a rebalancing of the relations between the characters. Mr. Kelada, who initially embodied the symbolic (social and cultural conventions), now takes on an imaginary role by understanding and empathizing with the woman's perspective. The woman, in turn, adopts a symbolic role. She is now presenting herself as a more complex and layered individual. It's a shift from the initial conflict and misunderstandings to a more complex and nuanced connection. The glimpse is a pact that signifies a shared understanding of the intricacies of their interactions as a necessity.



They are in a Mirror stage: Mr. Kelada receives the affirmation that he needs from the woman in the glass just like the child who receives the affirmation from the nod of the mother: "Yes! That is you!"

The wife's actions in the story can be seen as an attempt to assert herself in a symbolic realm that was dominated by Mr. Kelada. The wife's decision to wear an expensive necklace can be interpreted as an Imaginary construct to project a specific image of herself, possibly to provoke admiration or attention, however it brings her in balance with the symbolic inside the mirror.

To summarize here is a comparative Table:

Aspect	"The Purloined Letter"	"Mr. Know-All"
Symbolic	The hidden letter as a symbol of knowledge	Mr. Kelada navigating social conventions. - Cultural clash as Symbolic.
Real	King	Ramsey's jealousy and insecurity that produces a virtual Real
Imaginary	Fantasies and anxieties around the letter.	Wife's decision to wear an expensive necklace.



In the costume party, Mr-know-all is in a clown costume and confronts his Doppelgänger, his double coming from the opposite direction. He carries a tag on his back just in the same way that someone tags the other with "Fool" and the person does not know about what he is carrying on his back as his true signifier!



Narrator as a semit!

In another scene of the film version, the narrator appears in an Arab costume and Mr. Know-all is in a clown costume instead. The racist instance of the narrator reflected in the very first sentence of the story (*"I was prepared to dislike Mr. Kelada even before I knew him!"*) shows its true face as a fantasy where Mr. Kelada is acting a clown all the time but far from ignorant. It is a true mask: Authentic and a mask at the same time.

The choice to portray the narrator in an Arab costume may reflect the initial racist attitudes he holds. This mirrors the condescending and prejudiced views he expresses at the beginning of the story. **The Arab costume can be seen as a visual representation of his ego-ideal which is always paradoxical: "I hate what I truly love to become!"**



In magic there is a wall made of magic itself that divides the world into the Magician and his audience.

Mr. Kelada's clown persona, however, serves as a mask. Just like the symbolism of a clown, he may be using humor and a lighthearted demeanor as a way to deflect from his true, knowledgeable self: a powerful commentary on how appearances and stereotypes can be misleading. This misleading feature is emphasized by his mastery of magic. Just as a magician hides something from the audience's eyes while entrancing them, Mr. Kelada conceals his true self and intelligence behind the facade of a clown. Again, in magic, something is always hidden from the eyes of the audience. They are entrapped in the gaze of the magician all the time. here we are concerned with the crucial issue of the curvature of the space: **something must be rolled to be able to work as a hide**. This is visible in Velasques painting Las meninas that we can read it as the audience: those who do not know what is on the canvas on which Velasques is painting inside the very painting. This is the pure topology. A 180 degree bend of the space that divides the look from the gaze and produces phantasy.



Las maninas has a 180 roll-back: you see the back of the canvas (left side of the canvas) in front of the canvas (the painting itself). Then, this is the gaze that Lacan is talking about not anything else in this picture. (remember the contest of two painters, Zeuxis and Parrhasius below)



Zeuxis was born in Heraclea sometime around 464 BCE and was said to be the student of Apollodorus. Parrhasius (or Parrhasios) of Ephesus was a contemporary of Zeuxis. Both artists produced works on both wooden panels and frescoes on walls, unfortunately none of their work survives. The two were said to be the best painters of the fourth century BCE. The elder Pliny recorded a myth surrounding a competition between the two painters. It is said that Zeuxis created grapes that were so realistic that birds saw the image and attempted to eat them. Shortly after he went to view Parrhasius painting, and asked that the

curtain be lifted so he could look at the image only to discover that the curtain was itself the painting. Zeuxis acknowledged his defeat, because while he had tricked birds the curtain of Parrhasius had deceived a man and fellow artist. (Sources: Whitley, James. *The Archeology of Ancient Greece*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2001. by Alicia Hernandez)

Something must be rolled or bent to act as a hide (hole in our knowledge). This suggests that there is a hidden dimension to individuals that can only be revealed through a change in perspective. This transformation can be seen as a shift from what was a *gaze* to what is now a *look* (*Wo Es war soll ich werden*). The curvature of space, however, represents the barrier between what is visible and what remains concealed, giving rise to the realm of phantasy.

Velasquez's "Las Meninas" and Pure itself can be seen as a commentary on the gaze. The idea of a 180-degree bend in space, dividing the look from the gaze, is reminiscent of Lacan's concept of the gaze as that which cannot be directly seen, and it's the source of phantasy. The audience, just like the characters in the painting, may not know what is on the canvas that Velasquez is working on turning them into a virtual Real like Ramsey (I am referring all the time to Zizek's lecture on three different types of virtuality and Real referenced by Don.)

The sad side of the story is that the apples of fantasy fall not far from racism. This is readable in Mr. Know-all. Love of the homeland is the other side of the coin of xenophobia: misery of ignorance (being just a poor look in front of a powerful gaze) loves company. This idea of being "just a look in front of a powerful gaze" is significant. The gaze, as per Lacan's theory, signifies the power dynamic between the observer and the observed. In the case of the narrator, his gaze is initially one of superiority, fueled by ignorance and prejudice: "*I was prepared to dislike Mr. Kelada even before I knew him!*" This gaze reinforces his racist beliefs including the fear or discomfort with the unfamiliar. The story illustrates how ignorance can lead to the construction of barriers between individuals.

I once heard that the Nazis greeting is rooted in old German tradition of warriors who should show their hands empty as a signal of peace and to reveal that they have no weapon to kill.

Lack of danger. Hence an uncurled hand will reduce everything to a simple look/check:
"Look! I have nothing to hide!" on the other hand a foreigner is always a signal for danger:

I know that the origins of the Nazi salute, or "Heil Hitler" salute, have been a subject of historical debate but works as a good metaphor to contrast the curled hand with an open one. The concept of signaling peaceful intentions by showing empty hands has been a part of various human cultures and traditions over time. The act of extending an open hand to show that one is unarmed or harbors no ill intent is a universal gesture of peace and goodwill. The specific interpretation of such gestures can vary from culture to culture however we are mainly talking about a curled hand and an open hand here. Let us expand this simple idea to its extreme: The difference between the curled/curved and the flat space. I want to show that the topological nature of the fantasy is the general feature of any curved space that folds on itself:

Every mass curves the space around itself through its gravitational field. Maybe the reverse is true: The space creates a mass as the direct effect of its fold on itself. Phantasy obeys the same rule and hence it is topological in nature. Let us go back to our metaphor of the curled hand that can be likened to a closed folded space, representing a self-contained or hidden realm, In phantasy, this is related to the concealed aspects of the unconscious, the hidden motivations or desires of an individual, or the unspoken and unexamined elements of one's psyche: The ES=S. This means that the curved universality holds a singular at its very center. This is true for Kant and Sad, Masochist and Sadist, etc. In mathematics, Gödel's incompleteness theorems also highlight the presence of undecidable statements or propositions that exist within the structure of mathematical systems.

The truth is that we cannot differentiate look from the gaze, love from the hate and so on.. Here comes the *Hassliebe*: *Hassliebe* is a German term that combines two contrasting emotions: *Hass* means hatred or loathing, and *Liebe* means love. It can be translated as "love-hate relationship" in English. It describes a complex and contradictory emotional state in which someone simultaneously experiences strong feelings of both love and hate for a person, object, or situation. This term is often used to express the mixed or ambivalent emotions one may feel in a complicated or challenging relationship mostly with no direct reason or evidence: "***I was prepared to dislike Mr. Kelada even before I knew him!***"
The narrator is confessing that the space of my fantasy was already curved to the very point that Mr. Kelada was standing inside my look. This is the essence of unary trait: Transference: Something from the past becomes alive again in front of our eyes: Love at first glance, hate at first glance, and so on... Racism is hating someone without any necessary direct background with that very person. The background is already provided by the unary trait as something already prepared in transference¹. The person is just a shadow, what in German psychoanalysis is called: Projektion Fläsche"

Other Stories

¹ Transference refers to the unconscious redirection of feelings, desires, and expectations from one person or situation to another. It often involves projecting past experiences, particularly those related to authority figures or significant relationships, onto current or new individuals. Unary traits, on the other hand, are fundamental, unchanging attributes that we attribute to others.

Mr. Know-all has resemblances with two stories of Borges: "The Shape of the Sword" and "The Rose of Paracelsus". In the first one we see the same juxtaposition of the narrator from his first strategic point and in the second we see how the tricker hides the truth from the spectator who has hungry eyes for witnessing the magic.

The traverse between Sad and Kant, the universal and singularity, and so on.. discussed above is readable in Dastayoufski's Romans where a prostitute or a pimp or a snub abruptly undergoes an infinite act of moral and we remain shocked of that inside-out topological acrobatics.