



Hamlet (Vol. 35) - Madness

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MADNESS

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[Below, Jorgensen undertakes a psychological study of Hamlet's malady in terms of Renaissance and Freudian interpretations of melancholy as repressed anger, misdirected toward one's self rather than expressed outwardly.]

It is the purpose of this essay to call attention to an important, though doubtless secondary, objective of Hamlet's pilgrimage (like a Spenserian knight he can have more than one). This is the regaining of the sanity which he had formerly displayed as an ideal prince. Hamlet does recover; and his recovery is a part of the drama which grips us. Only thus can we fully account for the much-discussed "regeneration" of the hero in a play whose primary image is disease. And only thus can we realize the fullest meaning of his most impassioned speeches. We must view them as Hamlet's groping his way from an initial torpor and grief, through conscious anger, to a clear-sighted though troubled sanity. This groping serves as a prelude to his tragic wisdom and to his restoration as one who would have proved most royally had he been put on.

Unlike other psychological students of the play, I am not primarily concerned with the almost hopeless task of precisely diagnosing Hamlet's malady, and I am glad to agree with most critics¹ that it is mainly pathological grief and its consequent disturbance, melancholia. My concern is a happier one, to show how he achieves what we would today call psychotherapy. My major evidence outside the play is from Renaissance treatises. Those dealing with remedies for grief and melancholia are usually, to Shakespeare's enormous credit, only partly relevant to *Hamlet*. The best of them, however, achieve an insight that is borne out by Freud and later students. I shall not hesitate, from too great allegiance to historical scholarship, to avail myself of a doctrine merely because it has not become outmoded. Freud's Oedipal view of *Hamlet* is unacceptable to most literary students; but one cannot so easily dispose of Freudian theories that are supported by the text of the play and by Renaissance psychology. What is certain is that Shakespeare achieved insights into psychotherapy which, though deriving from sixteenth-century theory, go centuries beyond the crude formulations of this theory. This he did as a dramatist and not as a philosopher-psychologist, in which prosaic capacity he is firmly rooted in his own age.

Today we are decreasingly interested in what was formerly the big question of the play: Was Hamlet mad? The opinion of most literary scholars and psychoanalysts is that Hamlet, as he tells us, is afflicted by "sore distraction," that he occasionally suffers hysteria and mania, but that as a tragic hero he becomes sane enough to be responsible for his actions. This does not, however, rule out the temporary presence of disabling grief and melancholia, the most poignant qualities in his early soliloquies. Concerning Hamlet's mental disturbance, A. C. Bradley writes:

And if the pathologist calls his state melancholia, and even proceeds to determine its species, I see nothing to object to in that; I am grateful to him for emphasizing the fact that Hamlet's

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melancholy was no more common depression of spirits; and I have no doubt that many readers of the play would understand it better if they read an account of melancholia in a work on mental diseases.²

Bradley is right. If we turn to Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia" we find the following:

The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. This picture becomes a little more intelligible when we consider that ... the same traits are met with in mourning.³

This is the Hamlet that we see at the beginning of the play and generally throughout the first three acts. But a change surely occurs, and many critics have noticed it. Bradley (p. 120) observes in the fifth act "a slight thinning of the dark cloud of melancholy." This, he thinks, may be part of a new sense of power after his dispatching of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but mainly it is a "kind of religious resignation." According to O. J. Campbell, Shakespeare "does not leave his audience with the view of Hamlet as a slave to a kind of mental malady. The fatal wound in the Prince's breast restores his equilibrium and produces a brief interval of serenity."⁴ Robert Ornstein also attributes the improvement mainly to a last-minute confrontation of death, though he does see an improvement after the sea voyage.⁵ J. Q. Adams, who has made the only extensive psychological study of Hamlet's recovery, places the change in III.iv, with the appearance of the Ghost. According to Adams, the whole play breaks here:

From this time on Hamlet is increasingly better. He begins to display more interest in life, he takes on a more hopeful attitude towards the world, his thinking loses much of its morbid quality, and his confidence in human nature is in part restored. ... In the final scenes of the play—as in the jesting with Osric, or in the friendly fencing contest with Laertes—his melancholia has almost disappeared.⁶

Adams' estimate of the time of Hamlet's change is convincing, for the last scenes must show Hamlet acting rationally; insight delayed to the moment of death does not occur for even so slow a thinker as Othello. But Adams has no better reason for Hamlet's recovery than that melancholia passes normally through several stages, and recovery is, in time, inevitable. Time was indeed a Renaissance explanation for some cures,⁷ but it was hardly a dramatic or significant one. Shakespeare worked his hero's cure into the dramatic texture of the play.

Because Renaissance psychotherapy has been inadequately studied, it may be useful to survey briefly some of the approaches. Perhaps the most favored for melancholia was a religious one. But Hamlet does not, because he is not really a guilty soul, fit the category written about by so many Elizabethan divines. Paul H. Kocher has ably differentiated between the psychologically (or physiologically) and the religiously caused melancholia.⁸ Hamlet, unlike Lady Macbeth or Claudius with his "sick soul," would not have been classified as suffering from an afflicted conscience, which often had symptoms similar to psychological melancholia.⁹

When divines did offer guidance for psychological melancholia, they were not particularly helpful. When it is not manifestly derivative from psychological works, their advice (as exemplified by Thomas Adams, William Perkins, and Bishop Abernethy) is to mortify the passions. If the suffering is incurable, according to Perkins, "wee must humble our selves for our unquietnesse of minde. ... It is Gods will that we should suffer affliction, and withall humble our selves under his mightie hand."¹⁰ There may be a hint of this attitude in the "religious resignation" which Hamlet has been presumed to suffer (or achieve) at the end of the play, partially in his acceptance of Heaven's will in the punishment which will follow his slaying of Polonius and more clearly in

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his "There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow."¹¹ But Hamlet's *psychological* recovery, while perhaps related to this, is something achieved through the mind and emotions rather than through the will. I shall, however, refer to the religious theme later in the essay.

Moral philosophers were as busy as divines in offering advice and consolation. What is more, there is abundant evidence of their prescriptions in *Hamlet*; so much, in fact, that one might assume that they are held up as the ideal therapists. In a valuable article, "Hamlet's Book,"¹² Hardin Craig proposes that the volume which Hamlet enters reading (II.ii.168), and which he presumably reads during his solitude, is a familiar book of consolation, a work by Girolamo Cardano translated as *Cardanus Comforte* (1576). Professor Craig is undoubtedly correct in writing that "belief in the therapeutic power of books was characteristic of Renaissance students. If a hero found himself stricken with grief, as Hamlet did, it was natural that he should re-sort to a work on consolation. Cardano wrote *De consolatione* to comfort himself and all those stricken with grief (p. 18). Craig stresses the resultant universalizing of Hamlet's plight if we view him as benefiting from this moving book, for Cardano makes it clear that most of humanity is involved in the struggle against grief, fear, and weakness. Like other moral philosophers, Cardano stresses reasonableness and, above all, fortitude, which is principally what the grieving Hamlet has to learn.

Cardano is in the tradition of Plutarch, Cicero, Seneca, Boethius, and Thomas More. These writers have perhaps too little sympathy with human weakness or with strong, uncontrolled passions. Cardano is typical of them in writing, in a passage that seems to bear suggestively on Hamlet:

As therefore to cowards and men of no virtue, the timely death of the father hath ever brought hinderaunce: So to noble mindes: it be occasion whereby to shew themselves as they be. Thys must also be set before our eyes, that both lyfe and death be the gyftes of God, and do evermore depende upon his providence. Therefore whosoever reproveth lyfe or Death, doeth in sylence disalowe & complayne of the devine Judgement, because both the one and the other is meete and profitable. (fol. 45^v)

A similarly stern note is heard in: "A follye I do think to comferte those that through debility of mynde do cast themselves into misery: as foule delight, and desperate revenges" (fol. 10^r). Nevertheless even Cardano recognizes the occasional inadequacy of stern reason in dealing with grief: "for oftentimes, thoughe reason comferte us, and teache us that neither mourninge, is mete, neither that there is any cause of mourning, yet the sadde mynde of it selfe can not bee merye" (fol. 15^v). He must have known this from personal experience—a circumstance which lifts the *Comforte* above most books of consolation. Philippe de Mornay, another very wise and sensitive commentator on human misery, states what perhaps Hamlet and other students felt about the utility of the moral philosophers in dealing with mental suffering: "They pacify not the debates a man feeles in himselfe, they cure not the diseases of his minde."¹³

Hamlet may envy Horatio his Stoic self-sufficiency, his moderation, his ability to suffer all yet suffer nothing. He may read endlessly in the books (or book) of the philosophers. But so doing does not greatly help him. Much of the advice of Cardano and the other moral therapists is reproduced in the play, but it is not given the best of spokesmen. It is put into the mouths of Claudius and Gertrude. In the second scene, Hamlet is told that the death of fathers is common and natural, that to mourn excessively shows a will most incorrect to Heaven, a mind impatient. His attitude toward such reasoning is that "'tis common," probably implying that it is too much a matter of commonplace books and not enough a matter of dearly purchased experience. It is Claudius who triumphantly lays claim to successful conquest of grief, and through the very precepts of the "common" moral treatises:

Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death
The memory be green, and that it us befitted
To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole

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kingdom
To be contracted in one brow of woe,
Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature
That we with wisest sorrow think on him
Together with remembrance of ourselves.
(I.ii.1-7)

Hamlet cannot so easily dispel grief and melancholia. Nor do I think Shakespeare felt it a culpable flaw in him to fail in so doing. With Brabantio in *Othello*, Hamlet might say: "But words are words; I never yet did hear / That the bruised heart was pierced through the ear" (I.iii.218-219); or with the grieving Leonato in *Much Ado about Nothing*:

I will be flesh and blood;
For there was never yet philosopher
That could endure the toothache patiently.
(V.i.34-36)

Perhaps what is fundamentally wrong with the comfort books and the books of stern exhortation is that they talk at the patient. Shakespeare seems to have felt the hollowness of their encouragement and the futility of their comfort. We know from later experiences in treating melancholia that more dynamic methods, deriving from the patient's *experiencing* of emotion, are needed. These, moreover, would be ideally suited to drama.

Besides divines and moral philosophers, the Renaissance had many psychological writers, some of whom were also divines and some strictly physicians. But men like Timothy Bright, André du Laurens, Thomas Wright, Nicolas Coeffeteau, and Robert Burton, regardless of their area of learning, usually divide their therapy between the body and the mind. Therapy through the body was surely the least brilliant achievement of Renaissance psychology. Shakespeare ignores it in *Hamlet* (though he does not do so in *King Lear*). If Hamlet's disease had been humoral, then bloodletting, baths, and a very complicated diet would have been indicated.¹⁴ Significantly, none of those trying to cure Hamlet once suggest such procedures. Hence, most of the predominantly medical treatises are of no relevance.

Hamlet's relatives and supposed friends attempt to cure him by other strategies, most of them endorsed by the psychologists; and Shakespeare provides for his hero, in Horatio, one of the most commonly approved remedies for melancholia: a faithful friend.¹⁵ The friend should serve as someone to whom the sufferer can express his griefs and confide his secrets and in whom he can see the wholesomeness of sanity; a melancholy friend is dangerous. In all respects Horatio is exemplary. Hamlet sees in him a model of sanity, and Horatio is also an extraordinarily good listener. His "Ay, my lord" is his most characteristic utterance. But we do not very often witness Hamlet confiding any important emotions to Horatio. His most heartfelt unhappinesses are expressed in soliloquy. However, we should notice the degree to which Hamlet brightens up when he first sees Horatio, and even his exhilaration when he meets the two false friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

The latter two, incidentally, seem to be provided by the King not only as a means of sounding out Hamlet but as a possible way to cure the youth whose antics cause him and the court so much annoyance. They come to Hamlet as therapeutic friends. Rosencrantz explains to the Prince the psychological usefulness which doubtless Claudius sees in Hamlet's two schoolfellows: "You do surely bar the door of your own liberty if you deny your griefs to your friend" (III.ii.351-353). Guildenstern, upon receiving his charge from the King, exclaims: "Heavens make our presence and our practices / Pleasant and helpful to him!" (II.ii.38-39). And Claudius himself clarifies (at least ostensibly) his motives to both schoolmates:

so by your companies
To draw him on to pleasure, and to gather

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So much as from occasions you may glean,
Whether aught, to us unknown, afflicts him
thus,
That, open'd, lies within our remedy.
(II.ii.14-18)

For Claudius is one of the principal characters in the play trying to cure Hamlet. One of his most eager remarks occurs when Polonius makes his promising, but mistaken, diagnosis: love melancholy. Claudius, hearing of a likely solution, exclaims, "O, speak of that; that do I long to hear" (II.ii.50). Hamlet's therapy, not his death, has been Claudius' attempt from the beginning, and remains so probably until Claudius becomes aware of Hamlet's murderous intent. We have seen that the King's first words to Hamlet are aimed at correcting the Prince's stubborn grief. Claudius, in fact, follows in this scene the traditional prescription for a therapist given by Robert Burton:

By all means, therefore, fair promises, good words, gentle persuasions are to be used, not to be too rigorous at first, or to insult over them, not to deride, neglect, or contemn, but rather, as Lemnius exhorteth, to pity, and by all plausible means to seek to reduce them: but if satisfaction may not be had, mild courses, promises, comfortable speeches, and good counsel, will not take place; then, as Christopherus àVega determines, to handle them more roughly, to threaten and chide. ...¹⁶

Thus Claudius turns from "comfortable speeches" to a rougher handling during this scene. He is at first the kindly, fatherly counselor; then the severe uncle-father. Whether or not Claudius is sincerely seeking Hamlet's recovery, others would have viewed his solicitous and expert ministrations in this light.

The "precept" technique having failed, Claudius listens eagerly, but skeptically, to Polonius' diagnosis, and then endorses another psychological remedy for melancholia: diversion, particularly in the form of a play.¹⁷ This proves to be an even more disastrous failure. After the murder of Polonius, Claudius proposes on his own another of the perennial remedies, this one being sea travel:

Haply the seas and countries different
With variable objects shall expel
This something-settled matter in his heart,
Whereon his brains still beating puts him thus
From fashion of himself.
(III.i.179-183)

Psychologists were divided about the efficacy of this therapy, since it did not really alter the patient's view of himself or others.¹⁸ It is very unlikely that the sea voyage makes Hamlet psychologically well. The improvement is noticeable before he leaves Denmark. But the voyage promised to be useful to Claudius, while still preserving his reputation as a kindly therapist.

The Queen is to prove, in a way she does not guess, to be instrumental in Hamlet's recovery. But in her own shallow way, she too has been trying from the outset to cure her son. Her first diagnosis is a simple and fairly sound one: "I doubt it is no other but the main, / His father's death and our o'erhasty marriage" (II.ii.56-57). But upon hearing Polonius' diagnosis, she changes, perhaps without much conviction, to a new hope:

And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish
That your good beauties be the happy cause
Of Hamlet's wildness. So shall I hope your
virtues

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Will bring him to his wonted way again,
To both your honours.

(III.i.38-42)

It was believed, by du Laurens among others, that a victim of love melancholy could be improved by the possession of the love object.¹⁹ But Hamlet promptly relieves both Claudius and Gertrude of any hope on this score.

The play becomes more considerably a study in psychotherapy if we recognize that most of the principal characters—Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—are engaged in the frustrating business of trying to diagnose and cure Hamlet's malady. But he is not a pipe for all fingers to play upon. The source of his grief, like the grief itself, passes show. Above all, he illustrates what seems to have been Shakespeare's attitude to psychotherapy from without. One of the most poignant and lasting questions in Shakespeare is Macbeth's "Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd . . . ?" (V.iv.40). And the doctor's answer points the way toward what truly occurs in *Hamlet*: "Therein the patient / Must minister to himself." Hamlet recovers as a tragic hero and not merely as a mental patient. He achieves a new wisdom and self-knowledge; and this, I believe, is through the very modern, but also Renaissance, process of bringing to awareness his deepest feelings.

What is it in Hamlet's extremely complex nature that must come to the surface of consciousness? Many readers have noticed with dismay a ferocious quality in the gentle, meditative Prince. His treatment of Ophelia, if we are inclined to an ideal picture, approaches motiveless cruelty.²⁰ Bradley came close to the truth when he observed Hamlet's "almost savage irritability" (pp. 105-106). This anger is not, obviously, the fact about him-self that Hamlet most clearly recognizes in the first part of the play. It is, however, not unnoticed by Hamlet's keenest and most interested observer, Claudius. Near the midpoint of the play, the King perceives what I think the Renaissance would have recognized as the underlying source of Hamlet's melancholia. He calls it a "danger," but he is referring to the latent, grimly angry quality in Hamlet:

There's something in his soul
O'er which his melancholy sits on brood,
And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose
Will be some danger. . . .

(III.i.172-175)

It is "the hatch and the disclose" of Hamlet's anger which gives mounting drama to the play even as it gives the sick Prince health. It is fully recognized by Hamlet himself late in the play when he warns Laertes:

Sir, though I am not splenitive and rash,
Yet have I something in me dangerous,
Which let thy wiseness fear.

(V.i.284-286)

Melancholia is today recognized as often due to repressed rage. The anger, instead of being turned outward, is turned upon oneself, with resultant dejection, apathy, and self-reviling. This is the message of Dr. Karl Menninger's *Man against Himself* (1938). It was also so interpreted by Freud: "The self-tormenting in melancholia . . . signifies, just like the corresponding phenomenon in the obsessional neurosis, a satisfaction of trends of sadism and hate which relate to an object, and which have been turned round upon the subject's own self" (p. 251).

Objections to a Freudian interpretation of Shakespeare are often made on the grounds that it is anachronistic. We have here, however, a Freudian interpretation that was almost a Renaissance commonplace, with the one

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exception that Renaissance psychology did not construct a systematic theory based upon the unconscious. The system came much later, but the theory itself was both expounded by psychologists and depended upon for the correct interpretation of literary character.

The Renaissance recognized the inevitable relationship of passions, as it did of complexions. Joy may, as Miss Campbell has pointed out (p. 115), be the emotion commonly linked with grief. Such a connection was, however, one of the most obvious and least sophisticated observations made by Renaissance psychology. It was a far more brilliant observation to see that grief (with its resultant sorrow or melancholia) was inseparably linked with anger. Writing of pathological sorrow, Jean François Senault states:

Choler is of the same condition; though she make so much noise, she draws all her force from the Passions which compose her; and she appears not to be courageous, save only that she is well accompanied; she is never raised in our souls uncalled by Sorrow; she endeavors not satisfaction for injuries done unto her, unless sollicitated by Desire, provoked by Hope, and encouraged by Audacity; for he that is irritated, promiseth himself revenge of his enemy; but when he is so weak, as he cannot hope for it, his Choler turns to Sadnesse. ...²¹

The theory of the unconscious is here, but imperfect; for the false assumption is made that only fear of reprisal keeps one from venting anger and thus avoiding sorrow. A similar linking of choler and grief occurs in an earlier work, Coeffeteau's *A Table of Humane Passions*: "we must remember that *Choler* is also full of griefe and bitterness, for that it propounds the injury received, the which shee cannot easily digest ..." (p. 559). And it occurs in Burton: "Anger, a perturbation, which carries the spirits outwards, preparing the body to melancholy, and madness itself (p. 233). The connection between the two emotions goes back, however, not only to Shakespeare's time (e.g., Timothy Bright) but even to the classical period. In fact, one of the sources in which Shakespeare was most likely to have read of suppressed anger turning into sorrow or grief is Plutarch's life of Coriolanus. Martius alone, Plutarch writes, showed no outward anger at his banishment.

Not that he did patiently bear and temper his good hap, in respect of any reason he had, or by his quiet condition: but because he was so carried away with the vehemency of anger, and desire of revenge, that he had no sense nor feeling of the hard estate he was in, which the common people judge not to be sorrow, although it is the very same. For when sorrow (as you would say) is set afire, then it is converted into spite or malice. ...²²

The important adjunct of suppressed anger turning into grief is that, as Freud has noticed, the individual punishes himself. This tendency of grief to be self-punishing was noticed by Coeffeteau in 1621, though with inadequate emphasis upon the role of anger: "the soule helps to afflict herselfe, whether that melancholy workes this effect, or that the continual afflictions oppresse her in such sort, as she doth nothing but sigh under the burthen of sorrow ..." (p. 327). Shakespeare seems to have recognized more clearly than did psychologists the necessity for a choice between punishing oneself and punishing the real (external) source of grief. *Hamlet* affords the most sustained dramatic evidence of his awareness, but in other works the message is made more explicitly.

In *Much Ado about Nothing* Antonio tries to comfort his brother, Leonato, not only by hortatory words ... but by more dynamic psychological advice. He warns him of the danger and foolishness of self-recrimination:

If you go on thus, you will kill yourself;
And 'tis not wisdom thus to second grief
Against yourself.

(V.i.1-3)

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And he offers the sensible therapeutic advice: "Yet bend not all the harm upon yourself; / Make those that do offend you suffer too" (V.i.39-40).

A more sustained example of Shakespeare's depiction of paralytic grief slowly exposing the anger beneath occurs in *The Rape of Lucrece*. When Collatinus learns of the rape of his wife, he first exemplifies, as though in a speaking picture, the spectacle of one's grief raging, mutely, against oneself. Collatinus struggles, with at first only partial success, "to blow / The grief away that stops his answer so":

Lo, here, the hopeless merchant of this loss,
With head declin'd, and voice damm'd up
with woe,
With sad set eyes, and wretched arms across,
From lips new waxen pale begins to blow
The grief away that stops his answer so:
But, wretched as he is, he strives in vain;
What he breathes out his breath drinks up
again.

As through an arch the violent roaring tide
Outruns the eye that doth behold his haste,
Yet in the eddy boundeth in his pride
Back to the strait that forc'd him on so fast;
In rage sent out, recall'd in rage, being past:
Even so his sighs, his sorrows, make a saw,
To push grief on and back the same grief
draw.

(11. 1660-73)

This is a fairly close approximation to the grief-stricken Hamlet of the first soliloquy, turning most of his anger upon himself. These two stanzas reveal that catatonic grief is far from a passionless state. Then, in *Lucrece*, Brutus makes perfectly explicit, in advising his friend, that the anger should be turned outward:

Why, Collatine, is woe the cure for woe?
Do wounds help wounds, or grief help
grievous deeds?
Is it revenge to give thyself a blow
For his foul act by whom thy fair wife
bleeds?
Such childish humour from weak minds
proceeds;
Thy wretched wife mistook the matter so,
To slay herself, that should have slain her
foe.

(11. 1821-27)

Shakespeare was not alone among creative writers in recognizing this harsh truth. A comparable episode occurs in Sidney's *Arcadia*. Amphialus, reacting to grief first with "a deepe sigh ... seemed even to condemn him selfe, as though indeed his reproches were true. But howsoever the dulnes of Melancholy would have languishingly yeilded thereunto, his Courage (unused to such injuries) desired help of Anger. ... ²³

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The obvious therapy for melancholia, then, is to convert grief to its real, but disguised, source: anger.²⁴ The psychologist Timothy Bright cautiously prescribes this remedy, though only after first recommending that the patient try reason, divinity, and avoidance of disturbances (Bright became a divine after a career in medicine):

And if no other perswasion will serve a vehement passion, of another sort is to be kindled, that may withdrawe that vain and foolish sorowe into some other extremity, as of anger. ... For although they both breed a dislike, yet that proceedeth of other cause, rebateth the force of it which first gave occasion, and as one pinne is driven out with another, so the later may expell the former...²⁵

This is, except for the caution, the advice of Malcolm to the stunned Macduff. Like Hamlet, Macduff is first stricken by his own unworthiness rather than anger toward Macbeth. He refers to himself as "sinful Macduff (IV.iii.224). Malcolm tries to persuade the thane to break out of his torpor and express his real grievance—first of all merely to "give sorrow words." Then Malcolm speaks the lines that represent the outstanding insight of Renaissance psychotherapy: "Be this the whetstone of your sword; let grief / Convert to anger; blunt not the heart, enrage it" (IV.iii.228-229). Changing from the blunted to the enraged heart, and converting grief to anger—these represent the progress of Hamlet from self-reviling muteness to the consciously and accurately enraged Hamlet of the last scenes. To recount this progress would be to tell the play; I can here point only to a few crucial speeches and episodes.

When we first see Hamlet, he is almost catatonic in his melancholia. We learn from him that he sighs and weeps (recommended, yet superficial, ways of relieving grief), but he speaks almost not at all to other people. His hostility to his parents is expressed only obliquely, sometimes in asides and in ironic and punning comments.²⁶ Irony is of course a disciplined, intellectual rather than emotional, form of expressing anger. It does not ease the heart; and Hamlet later in the second scene, at the end of his first soliloquy, seems to apprehend an important fact about his grief: "It is not, nor it cannot come to good.—/ But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue" (I.ii.158-159). The body of the soliloquy does outwardly direct some anger—toward his mother's behavior—but it is spoken only to himself. In speaking to his mother, he is coldly courteous. The tone of the soliloquy and its principal direction point to self-punishment. It is not his mother whom he wishes to destroy but himself:

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!
(I.ii.129-132)

In Hamlet's second soliloquy (II.ii.575-634) the anger is much more evident. In fact, the soliloquy is his most ranting one. He is beginning to feel, though not to express to others, the fullness of his anger: "Bloody, bawdy villain! / Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!" Significantly, however, almost all of the abusive language of the speech is still directed against himself. He is "a rogue and peasant slave," "a dull and muddy-mettled rascal," "an ass." But he is much more alive than he was in the dull grief of the first soliloquy. He may be angry mainly with himself, but he is at least consciously trying to whip himself into a perception of the emotion that underlies his melancholia. Anger, though misdirected, has come very much to the surface.

In Hamlet's progress from grief to anger, the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy (III.i.56-88) is crucial. After it is spoken, Hamlet seems capable of venting his anger upon Ophelia, though only indirectly upon Claudius (who overhears the veiled threats but is not, strictly speaking, addressed as an enemy). The soliloquy is usually interpreted as a contemplation of suicide. It is certainly, but not totally, that. Hamlet is still more grieved than angered, more intent upon punishing himself than upon punishing others. But we should observe that the second line of the speech turns to a subject somewhat different from the more famous first line:

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Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them.

"Suffer," or "bear," as opposed to "take arms," becomes the key word of the rest of the soliloquy. Indeed, the speech is thoroughly meaningful only if we take it to express Hamlet's growing awareness that his one hope (Heaven is not yet seen as "ordinant") is to change from passiveness to angry activity. It is a debate, not simply whether to be or not to be, but whether to "bear" or to do. "For who would *bear* the whips and scorns of time ... ?" "Who would fardels *bear* ... ?" Only fear of the future "makes us rather *bear* those ills we have." Significantly, much of the grievance is directed outward: against the oppressor, the proud man, unrequited love, the law, the insolence of office, and the suffering of the patient man. From this point onward Hamlet is much less patient. His "danger" is becoming overt. Within a few lines he is lashing against Ophelia and women, and we thereby are becoming aware, as is Hamlet himself, of where his true hostility lies.

The anger is against his mother, though it is first mis-directed against Ophelia and all women. By the end of III.ii, Hamlet is no longer a victim of melancholia, precisely because he has turned the frightening force of his hatred upon the one person who has most cruelly betrayed him and his father. Here, incidentally, one must radically depart from the Oedipal theory. To assume that the Prince resents his father, one must disregard not only Renaissance psychology but the most emotional passages of the play. Perhaps for this reason the psychoanalytical critics, including Ernest Jones (the best of them), are indifferent to Hamlet's recovery from mental distress. One can account for this recovery only through the content of the emotional speeches and their change of hostile direction from Hamlet to his mother. The elder Hamlet *never*, even after Hamlet's hostility has come to full consciousness, is spoken of unlovingly.

"Now could I drink hot blood" (III.ii.408). In this passionate declaration Hamlet is still speaking only to himself, but there is no doubt of the completeness with which he has transferred his loathing from himself to his mother. He could now, if it were not for being unnatural, become like Nero. When we next see him with his mother, in the great closet scene (III.iv), he speaks no longer to himself but to her. The scene is dramatically, perhaps, the most successful in the play. Except for the soliloquies, it contains Hamlet's most heartfelt lines. In fact, it is the only scene in the play in which Hamlet talking to others is as impressive as Hamlet talking to himself. It is this, I believe, because it is essentially dealing with the same theme as the soliloquies: Hamlet's anger. But it is less subtle and interesting than the soliloquies because the anger is not so painfully disguised.

Even here, however, Hamlet must—for the last time—struggle against his impulse to suppress his true feelings. The struggle is now a brief one and occurs only because the Ghost appears and warns him to comfort his mother. The Ghost, who (very much like the early Hamlet) has "a countenance more in sorrow than in anger," does not share Hamlet's murderous hatred of his mother; indeed, it is partially the Ghost's command that has kept Hamlet from more promptly converting his grief to anger. The Ghost now looks at Hamlet in a way almost to redirect his emotion to tears rather than anger:

Do not look upon me,
Lest with this piteous action you convert
My stern effects; then what I have to do
Will want true colour, tears perchance for
blood.

(III.iv.127-130)

The hesitancy, however, does not last. Hamlet does not kill his mother, but he speaks to her with "words like daggers" and with brutal, sexually specific candor. By the end of IV.iv, there is no question as to his

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commitment: "O, from this time forth, / My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth" (IV.iv.65-66).

The importance to Hamlet of the closet scene has been recognized by John E. Hankins, who calls the scourging of Gertrude almost a "conversion" for the Prince:

Nowhere after this scene does Hamlet show the same bitterness that he had earlier expressed. Even in his subsequent resolve to kill the King, he seems animated by a desire for justice rather than by vengeful hatred. ... The emotional catharsis of his experience has given him a certain serenity of spirit which he has not felt at any earlier time in the play.²⁷

But Hamlet does not (occasion does not permit it) entirely lose his anger; and one may well ask what effect such an emotion would have upon a final Renaissance estimate of the hero. Although anger was a dangerous passion, it had its defenders, particularly those who recognized that there was no such state as a lack of passion, and that if a cause for anger existed, it was hazardous and foolish to suppress the emotion. Pierre Charron writes, typically, of the danger of "smothering" choler:

There are some that smother their choler within, to the end it breake not forth, and that they may seeme wise and moderate; but they fret themselves inwardly, and offer themselves a greater violence than the matter is worth. It is better to chide a little, and to vent the fire, to the end it be not everardent and painfull within. ... *All diseases that appeare openly are the lighter, and then are most dangerous when they rest hidden with a counterfet health.*²⁸

The quotation is an apposite one, for the central image in the play is the opening of a hidden disease. Montaigne speaks to much the same effect, and with his refreshing and prophetic good sense:

I would rather perswade a man, though somewhat out of season, to give his boy a wherret on the eare, then to dissemble this wise, sterne or severe countenance, to vex and fret his minde. And I would rather make show of my passions, then smother them to my cost: which being vented and exprest, become more languishing and weake: Better it is to let its pointe worke outwardly, then bend it against our selves.²⁹

There may also be present in *Hamlet* an endorsement of what Hiram Haydn has called the "ireful virtues" as opposed to the Stoic virtues in the movement which he proposes under the name of the Counter-Renaissance.³⁰ Certainly in all of Shakespeare's four major tragedies there are extended, and usually persuasive, passages defending an aggressive rather than passive confronting of grief. In *King Lear*, which alone we have not considered, the King spends much effort in deciding between patience (involving grief and tears) and wrathful revenge. It does not matter to the Tightness of his conclusion that he is actually unable to take revenge:

You see me here, you gods, a poor old man,
As full of grief as age; wretched in both!
If it be you that stirs these daughters' hearts
Against their father, fool me not so much
To bear it tamely; touch me with noble anger,
And let not women's weapons, water-drops,
Stain my man's cheeks!

(II.iv.275-281)

Shakespeare, unlike the moral Spenser of Book II of *The Faerie Queene*, did not decisively condemn noble anger.³¹

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Are we, after all, to assume that the intolerable suffering of a tragic hero is better than the display of anger? Is anger against oneself really better than anger against others? If we so conclude, we must condemn Hamlet and his final, healthy self in a world worthy of anger. Hamlet in the last scene *is* angry, furiously angry. The good nature and fairness he has shown to Laertes and the King is mightily abused, and he reacts with anger no longer toward himself but toward the aggressors.

He does, however, show intermittently what Hankins rightly calls "a certain serenity of spirit." And because the religious motif is so strong in the final scene, one hesitates to ascribe his serenity primarily to psychological recovery. Critics have written at length about the "regeneration" of Hamlet, and by this they mean his spiritual, not his psychological, well-being.³² Perhaps the two are not so disparate as we make them today, notably in literary criticism. Perhaps the only kind of religious acceptance that counts dramatically is that achieved with a clear mind. A Hamlet destroyed during the depths of his melancholia would scarcely be a tragic hero. We should also not forget that only the last scene shows a religiously serene Hamlet. His psychological recovery has occurred safely before this time.

But I do not wish to arouse the anger of the religious critics (many of whom would do well to sample the efforts of Elizabethan divines to treat melancholia). All that I seek to achieve in this essay is a renewed respect for the psychological view of *Hamlet*, without in any way minimizing the importance of a religious view, here and in much great tragedy.³³ The psychological view, particularly if the sufferer achieves new insight, can lead to emotions comparable to those claimed by the religious view. Man can, after all, win his tragic way to wisdom not merely through resignation to God's will, but also through self-knowledge, through understanding his own hidden thoughts and feelings. Hamlet, at once the most religious and most intelligent of Shakespeare's heroes, does both.

Notes

¹ A good Renaissance diagnosis is made by Lily B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes: Slaves of Passion* (New York, 1952), Ch. xii. More modern diagnoses will be cited later.

² *Shakespearean Tragedy* (New York, 1960), p. 103. This, in general, is the opinion of scholars like J. Q. Adams, T. M. Parrott, and J. Dover Wilson.

³ In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London, 1957), XIV, 244.

⁴ *Hamlet*, ed. O. J. Campbell et al. (New York, 1961), p. 7.

⁵ *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy* (Madison, 1960), pp. 237-238.

⁶ *Hamlet*, ed. Joseph Quincy Adams (Boston, 1929), p. 288.

⁷ E.g., Nicolas Coeffeteau, *A Table of Humane Passions*, trans. E. Grimestone (London, 1621), p. 335.

⁸ *Science and Religion in Elizabethan England* (San Marino, 1953). See particularly pp. 302-303; also his excellent article "Lady Macbeth and the Doctor," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, V (1954), 341-349.

⁹ For the difference between the two afflictions see William Perkins, *The Estate of a Christian in This Life*, in *Works* (Cambridge, 1605), p. 435.

¹⁰ *An Exposition upon the Lords Prayer*, in *Works*, p. 406. See also

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- ¹¹ III.iv.173-175; V.ii.230. All Shakespeare references are to *The Complete Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare*, ed. W.A. Neilson and C. J. Hill (Boston, 1942).
- ¹² *Huntington Library Bulletin*, No. 6 (1934), pp. 17-37.
- ¹³ *A Discourse of Life and Death*, trans. Mary, countess of Pembroke (London, 1592), sig. [C4]^v .
- ¹⁴ For the strictly physical remedies for melancholia, see Philip Barrough, *The Method of Phisick* (London, 1596), pp. 47-48.
- ¹⁵ E.g., Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde* (London, 1604), p. 78.
- ¹⁶ *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Floyd Dell and Paul Jordan-Smith (New York, 1941), pp. 476-477.
- ¹⁷ Recommended by Burton, p. 482; Coeffeteau, pp. 343-345.
- ¹⁸ Justus Lipsius speaks against travel on the grounds that it is superficial. See *Two Bookes of Constancie*, trans. Sir John Stradling, ed. Rudolf Kirk (New Brunswick, 1939), p. 75.
- ¹⁹ André du Laurens, *A Discourse of the Preservation of the Sight* (London, 1599), p. 121. Burton, p. 798, calls this the "last refuge and surest remedy."
- ²⁰ Dover Wilson remarks: "The attitude of Hamlet to-wards Ophelia is without doubt the greatest of all the puzzles in the play. ..." *What Happens in Hamlet* (New York, 1935), p. 101.
- ²¹ *The Use of Passions*, trans. Henry, earl of Monmouth (London, 1671), pp. 404-405. An earlier edition of this translation appeared in 1649.
- ²² *Shakespeare's Plutarch*, ed. C. F. Tucker Brooke (London, 1909), II, 174.
- ²³ *The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia*, ed. Albert Feuillerat (Cambridge, Eng., 1939), p. 454.
- ²⁴ This is suggested, but without application to *Hamlet*, by Ruth Leila Anderson in her pioneering study, *Elizabethan Psychology and Shakespeare's Plays* (Iowa City, 1927), p. 91. Laertes is effectively cited by Miss Campbell (p. 115) as a youth who successfully converts his grief to anger.
- ²⁵ *A Treatise of Melancholy* (London, 1586), pp. 255-256.
- ²⁶ Later he is to resort to the "antic disposition," which permits him freedom to insult others. I suspect that the need for expressing anger, and not hysteria or caginess, is the real reason for the antic disposition.
- ²⁷ *The Character of Hamlet and Other Essays* (Chapel Hill, 1941), pp. 51-52.
- ²⁸ *Of Wisdome*, trans. S. Lennard (London, 1625), p. 564. Moreover, the irascible power was generally considered to be more desirable than the concupiscible (including grief). See Coeffeteau, pp. 28-29.
- ²⁹ "Of Anger and Choler," *The Essayes of Montaigne*, trans. John Florio (New York, [1933]), p. 645.
- ³⁰ *The Counter-Renaissance* (New York, 1950). For *Hamlet* see pp. 619-636.

³¹ Anger is of course not the solution to Lear's mental suffering. He is not a melancholiac. The Alcibiades episode in *Timon of Athens* (III.v) also vindicates anger as opposed to "bearing."

³² The strongest interpretation is that of J. A. Bryant, Jr., *Hippolyta's View. Some Christian Aspects of Shakespeare's Plays* (Lexington, 1960), Ch. viii. See also

³³ I try to bring the two together in my article "Hamlet and the Restless Renaissance," *Shakespearean Essays* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1964). Therein, in fact, I argue that a goodly part of Hamlet's self-deprecation has a religious (as well as psychological) basis.

Carroll Camden (essay date 1964)

SOURCE: "On Ophelia's Madness," in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Spring, 1964, pp. 247-55.

[In the following essay, Camden argues that Ophelia's madness is largely precipitated by her unrequited love for Hamlet, rather than her father's death.]

The character of Ophelia seems to have been puzzling to many critics who have written about the play. As a minor personage of the tragedy, she has not received the careful analysis accorded Hamlet, Gertrude, or Claudius, or even Laertes, Horatio, or Polonius. Her role in the play is not clear to critical writers who have attempted to answer the many questions which arise about Ophelia's relations with her father and with Hamlet—questions which must be answered if her madness is to be explained. Is her madness occasioned by her father's death? by her rejected love for Hamlet? or by both, in varying degrees?

The romantic critics apparently felt that the less said about Ophelia the better. "What shall be said of her? for eloquence is mute before her!" asks Mrs. Jameson. Hazlitt considers that she "is a character almost too exquisitely touching to be dwelt upon", and calls her a "flower too soon faded". Strachey writes, "There is more to be felt than to be said in the study of Ophelia's character just because she is a creation of such perfectly feminine proportions and beauty". And Bradley believes that in her fate we have "an element, not of deep tragedy, but of pathetic beauty, which makes the analysis of her character seem almost a desecration".¹

Ophelia has received better treatment than this, of course, and she deserves better. She is not just the "poor wispy Ophelia" which Katherine Mansfield would make her, but a tenderhearted, delicate-minded young girl, well reared in proper obedience to her father, and experiencing what is apparently her first introduction to the bittersweet delights of love. And yet her tragedy seems to me to have been misinterpreted by a long array of critics, who have emphasized that her madness is due chiefly to the death of her father. According to John Draper, Ophelia's madness "comes about ... because that father, whom she loved so dearly, came to a sudden and shocking end". L. L. Schücking, after remarking that "Grief at her father's sudden and unexplained death has unbalanced her mind", argues that any modern spectator who thinks that her madness is due to the broken relations with Hamlet is confuted by Shakespeare's making Claudius "expressly state that her madness is due to Polonius' death". Rebecca West goes so far as to say, "No line in the play suggests that she felt either passion or affection for Hamlet". In the last century, Roderick Benedix writes of Polonius' death as serving a dramatic purpose, "inasmuch as it is the cause of Ophelia's madness", but at the same time he perceives that "No girl becomes insane because her father dies, least of all Ophelia. ..." Even Laurence Babb, although he notes the resemblance between the madness of Ophelia and that of the Jailer's daughter in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and though he believes that the "lovesick maidens of the early Stuart drama" were influenced by Ophelia, can write that it is not unrequited love which is chiefly responsible for Ophelia's condition but rather "grief for her father's death". Despite these pronouncements, as well as that of G. L. Kittredge that "it is the mysterious tragedy of her father's death that has driven her mad", I believe it can be shown that the overriding cause of Ophelia's madness is clearly spelled out in the play; it is more "the pangs of despiz'd love" which

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cause her tragic fate than the death of Polonius.²

The first we see of Ophelia is when she receives some parting advice from her brother, as Laertes prepares to go abroad. He thinks of himself as a worldly-wise young man explaining the chief pitfall which a green girl is likely to encounter in the life at court. He warns her that Hamlet is merely playing with her affections and that she must not consider his attentions as more than "a violet in the youth of primy nature ... the perfume and suppliance of a minute". And he continues by saying that as the body becomes of age, the mind and soul which service the temple of the body also grow and cause youth to be attracted toward the opposite sex. Laertes cautions her to realize that her own feelings are somewhat in this category, since "the chariest maid is prodigal enough" when opportunity is afforded her, and "youth to itself rebels". Of course Laertes' advice is shallow; he seemingly judges Hamlet to be a man like himself. And Ophelia is perceptively aware of his shallowness as she reminds him in sisterly fashion to heed his own warnings; then Laertes suddenly remembers that he is in a hurry to depart. But through this speech Laertes may well have aroused what he sought to allay, by focusing Ophelia's thoughts on the subject of love, already kindled by her own inchoate desires.

Polonius contributes to Ophelia's absorption in matters of love as he indicates how the senses of youth are easily inflamed. She must not take the heat of Hamlet's desire as true love. Polonius then delivers the blow which has blighted the lives of many girls as he tells his daughter that she must break off with Hamlet and never again talk with him.

A further shock to Ophelia, one full of dramatic irony, occurs offstage when Hamlet bursts into her boudoir. Having been warned by her brother and her father of the sexual frailties of youth, she finds some support for their remarks in the actions of Hamlet in her closet. She fears that Hamlet is mad for love, and if so he is mad for the love that she has been forbidden to give him—she is the cause of Hamlet's madness. We need not pause to consider the real significance of Hamlet's actions here. It suffices that Hamlet's behavior gives her every reason to believe her father right in his diagnosis of the cause of Hamlet's madness. It is a species of irony that the proscription given by Polonius seems to bring about Hamlet's pretended madness but actually contributes to Ophelia's real madness. When Ophelia reports Hamlet's conduct, Polonius sees that Hamlet suffers from "the very ecstasy of love", but never suspects that in following his orders Ophelia is about to succumb to the same ecstasy, "whose violent property fordoes itself and leads the will to desperate undertakings". Polonius is quick to tell his daughter that when she "did repel his letters and denied his access" to her she caused Hamlet to run mad; but since he is a self-absorbed busybody who regards his daughter as a tool, he gives no thought to the effect that all this will have on Ophelia. Indeed, a further irony lies in the actual words of Polonius as he gives to the King and Queen his prognosis of the disease in Hamlet:

I prescripts gave her
That she should lock herself from his resort,
Admit no messengers, receive no tokens.
Which done, she took the fruits of my advice;
And he, repulsed—a short tale to make—

Fell into a sadness, then into a fast,
Thence to a watch, thence into a weakness,
Thence to a lightness, and, by this declension,
Into the madness wherein now he raves,
And we all mourn for.

(II. ii. 142-151)

The defective effect of Ophelia's madness to come has the same cause; Polonius' prescripts have their effect on Ophelia too. Throughout the play, indeed, the appearance of Hamlet's pretended madness is contrasted

with the reality of Ophelia's madness.

The next shock to the tender sensibilities of Ophelia is the get-thee-to-a-nunnery scene. She now believes that she herself is the immediate source of Hamlet's madness. She believes, too, that Hamlet loves her; and her actions, if not her words, indicate that she has more than warm feelings for him, as witness the patience with which she listens to Hamlet during his mad speech. Yet when she meets him to return his tokens of love, he tells her, "I did love you once. ... You should not have believed me. ... I loved you not." She must wonder whether her father and brother were not right after all. To complete the disillusionment, Hamlet uses offensive language to her, language that no sensitive girl could endure with equanimity. He asks her if she is chaste, and insults her further with comment on her affected walk and speech, her use of cosmetics, her "wantonness". Though the language is general enough in its reflections on womankind, and though it is used for the benefit of the hidden Claudius and Polonius, yet the tone is ill-mannered and is an affront which Ophelia would feel deeply.

Commentators also wonder whether or not Hamlet really loved Ophelia. But the point here is that whether he did or not, Ophelia thought he did. In his letter to her he wrote: "That I love thee best, O most best, believe it. ... Thine evermore". When in the scene just examined Hamlet says, "I did love you once", Ophelia replies, "Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so". And when Hamlet retires from the scene, Ophelia speaks of herself as being "of ladies most deject and wretched". That she returned the love is clearly indicated as she lets the audience know in a soliloquy what is running through her mind, characterizing herself as one "that sucked the honey of his music vows". Vows and words of love are music only in the ears of those who return the feelings of love.

In the play scene, the relations between Hamlet and Ophelia remain much the same as in the scene just discussed. Hamlet continues to use bawdy language; Ophelia modestly declines the obscene implications of his question, "Shall I lie in your lap?" and seems not to understand some of the conversation. But when the Prologue enters and Hamlet puns on the word "show", she tells him he is naughty. Several lines further, Ophelia comments on the sharpness of his repartee, only to receive the reply, "It would cost you a groaning to take off my edge". Although Hamlet's language may have been calculated to convince Claudius that he is mad for love, it certainly was the sort to disturb even more the delicate balance of the susceptible girl who saw herself to blame.

Ophelia's mind is further agitated in the same scene. When Hamlet asks whether the actor is speaking a true prologue or giving a "posy" for a ring, she agreeably replies that it certainly is brief, only to hear Hamlet's "As woman's love". His remark is usually glossed as being his comment on the conduct of his mother, and this interpretation may well be correct. But Ophelia must think that Hamlet is speaking of her own conduct toward him.

When we next hear of Ophelia, it is to learn of her madness. The Gentleman prepares us for her entrance by describing her actions for the Queen. According to him Ophelia talks much of her father and says there are deceptions in the world. She should know, since she has practised some herself in lying to Hamlet concerning her father's whereabouts, and she has had others practised on her by Hamlet. Her first words upon entering are, "Where is the beauteous majesty of Den-mark?" Surely she is not talking of her father here, since the words fit neither what we know of Polonius nor what a girl would say of a father who fails to understand her. Nor is there any reason why Gertrude should be the subject of her question. Rather it is to Hamlet that her words apply, whom she has already characterized as

The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
The observed of all observers, quite, quite
down!
And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,

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That suck'd the honey of his music vows,
Now see that noble and most sovereign
reason,
Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and
harsh;
That unmatch'd form and feature of blown
youth
Blasted with ecstasy.

(III. i. 161-168)

Hamlet, then, is the "beauteous majesty"; it is upon Hamlet that her mind in its madness dwells. And the first of the song-snatches she sings is about "true love".

How should I your true love know
From another one?
By his cockle hat and staff,
And his sandal shoon.

Surely no one contends that Polonius is her true love. And when the Queen inquires the import of the song, Ophelia asks her to listen to the next lines:

He is dead and gone, lady,
He is dead and gone;
At his head a grass-green turf,
At his heels a stone.

The Queen starts to say something, but again Ophelia asks her to listen:

White was his shroud as the mountain
snow,—
Larded with sweet flowers;
Which to the grave did go
With true-love showers.

(IV. v. 23-39)

The first four lines are apparently part of a traditional verse. The other lines have no connection with this Walsingham poem as printed in the *Garland of Good Will* or the version in the Bodleian manuscript. It is possible, however, that the three quatrains were part of a single poem. Whether they were or not is unimportant; what is important is that both the first and third quatrains tell of true love and would naturally be linked in Ophelia's mind with Hamlet. Perhaps, then, in her mind it is Hamlet who is "dead and gone" since he is dead and gone for her. The point is that Polonius makes an unlikely candidate to appear among verses on true love.

The King has already made his entrance; he now greets Ophelia: "How do you, pretty lady?" She responds to the greeting in the conventional fashion, scarcely noticing him. Then she speaks a line referring to a moral tale designed to teach children to be kind and generous to the poor, and follows it with the words: "Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be. God be at your table." The King thinks her ramblings to be "conceit upon her father". That can hardly be. The moral tale has no apparent application; and knowing what we are but not what we may become wonderfully expresses both Ophelia's former concern over Hamlet's condition and her own distressing state.

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Of course we should probably make little or nothing of Ophelia's non sequiturs in this scene. To derive intelligent meaning from them would be to group ourselves with others who remark her ramblings and "botch the words up to fit their own thoughts". Yet in apparent reply to the King's words Ophelia rejects his interpretation and recites sixteen lines of immodest verse on sexual love, the effect of which underlines strongly the chief cause of her madness: "Pray you, let's have no words of this; but when they ask you what it means, say you this":

Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's day,
All in the morning betime,
And I a maid at your window,
To be your Valentine.
Then up he rose, and donn'd his clothes,
And dupp'd the chamber-door;
Let in the maid, that out a maid
Never departed more. . . .
By Gis and by Saint Charity,
Alack, and fie for shame!
Young men will do't, if they come to't;
By cock, they are to blame.
Quoth she, before you tumbled me,
You promised me to wed.
So would I ha' done, by yonder sun,
An thou hadst not come to my bed.

(IV. v. 48-66)

These coarse and uninhibited lines are the sort which might unconsciously and naturally float to the top of Ophelia's muddled mind if her thoughts had been dwelling on Hamlet's love and on possible marriage to him. As by certain dreams "may we conjecture of *the sinnes of the heart*: because what we conceiue or practice in the day will be corruptly dreamed of in the night",³ so when one mentally disturbed speaks "things in doubt, that carry but half sense", we may rightly judge the sources of her perturbations to lie in her secret desires.

Ophelia now indeed speaks of her father, saying that she cannot help weeping "to think they should lay him i' the cold ground". After she makes her exit, the King repeats his first diagnosis, saying, "this is the poison of deep grief; it springs all from her father's death". But of course Claudius has his own axe to grind since he wishes to stir Laertes up to ridding him of Hamlet. We can allow the statement that Ophelia's words and actions spring from deep grief, but not all from the death of Polonius.

When Ophelia reenters later in the scene, her brother is on stage; as he sees her madness he speaks of her in extravagant terms of sorrow, concluding somewhat enigmatically that human nature is delicate in matters of love, and when it is so "it sends some previous instance of itself after the thing it loves". Immediately following the words of Laertes, Ophelia sings more snatches of songs. The first indeed sounds as though her father is in her mind. Yet if so, the last line of the quatrain as it is printed in Fl is curious: "Fare you well, my dove!" Are these not rather the words Ophelia might use to Hamlet? Her next little song ("You must sing a-down a-down, An you call him a-down-a") might suit anyone: Laertes or Claudius, as well as Polonius or Hamlet. Ophelia comments: "O, how the wheel becomes it! It is the false steward, that stole his master's daughter." We can only conjecture the antecedent of *it*; but the story of the false steward does have something to do with love, and nothing to do with a dead father. The language of flowers follows, though there are no violets since "they withered all when my father died". But the next snatch ("For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy") again is from a song of love. The last song must refer to Polonius, since in it occur the lines, "No, no, he is dead" and "His beard was as white as snow".

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The remaining act of Ophelia's pitiful tragedy takes place off stage, and we learn of it from the beautifully poetic account of the Queen. According to Gertrude, to put it prosaically, Ophelia crowned herself with a garland of oddly assorted flowers and weeds, climbed a willow tree, and fell into a stream when the branch on which she sat broke. She floated for a while, continuing to sing "snatches of old tunes", then sank to "muddy death". Note that even at her watery end, the "envious sliver" which let her fall is that of a willow, a tree linked in Shakespeare and elsewhere in Elizabethan literature with unrequited love.

Of course it seems quite reasonable that Ophelia would have some degree of affection for her father. And obviously, too, his death was a traumatic experience for her. Yet I believe that Katherine Mansfield is quite perceptive in her brief analysis of the relationship between father and daughter. Concerning Polonius she says, "Who can believe that a solitary violet withered when that silly old Pomposity died? And who can believe that Ophelia really loved him, and wasn't thankful to think how peaceful breakfast would be without his preaching."⁴ The death of Polonius, then, may well have been only the last in a series of shocks to her basically weak personality. First the love that Hamlet had declared for her, then the warning of her brother and her father, her father's orders not to receive Hamlet or talk with him or accept messages or gifts from him, Hamlet's visiting her closet and indicating that she herself is responsible for his madness, the return of Hamlet's tokens and his unseemly language to her in the nunnery scene, his refusal of her, his gross proposal to her (though perhaps spoken facetiously or to confuse Claudius) and his indecent speech at the play scene, together with the constant references made in her presence throughout the tragedy to such matters as "a fashion and a toy in blood", "blazes", "mad for love", "desperate undertakings", "are you honest?" "I loved you not", "believe none of us", "make your wantonness your ignorance", "country matters", "lie between a maid's legs", "be not you ashamed to show", "brief... as woman's love"—these are the overt causes of Ophelia's madness. Though every kind of suggestion has been made to interpret practically every line in the play, we can be thankful that no one has suggested an Electra complex in Ophelia; she was not in love with Polonius. Thomas Hanmer, early in the eighteenth century, clearly stated the principle: "It is not often that young women run mad for the loss of their fathers".⁵ Young people can usually regard the death of a parent with some degree of equanimity, but the death of their own prospects is quite another matter.

The parallel of Ophelia's madness and that of the Jailer's daughter in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is very apt; and it strengthens the belief that Ophelia is "distract" from unrequited love. Early in the play the Jailer's daughter, feeling her madness coming on, says: "Let not my sense unsettle, Lest I should drown or stab or hang myself. Later in the play she rushes into the water ("sought the flood") but is saved by her Wooer. Further, she sings snatches of many songs, as does Ophelia. One of the songs has the refrain "Hey, nonny, nonny, nonny". She forgets one song but remembers that its refrain is "Down a, down a". She says she knows the song "Bonny Robin", and sings "Willow, willow, willow", the song of unrequited love also sung by Desdemona.⁶ Like Ophelia, too, she frequently talks in a bawdy fashion and asks the Wooer, thinking him to be Palamon, to go to bed with her.⁷ Interestingly also, although it is specifically stated that she is mad for love, she too talks of her father's death and says that when he dies she will gather flowers for his burial; but "then she sang nothing but 'Willow, willow'", and instead of a coronet of weeds she makes rings of the rushes and speaks to them such pretty posies of love as "Thus our true love's tied" and "This you may lose, not me". Later she remarks, "We maids that have our livers perish'd, crack'd to pieces with love, we shall come there and do nothing all day long but pick flowers with Proserpine. Then will I make Palamon a Nosegay." She speaks of hell and says that "if one be mad, or hang or drown themselves, thither they go. ..." When the Doctor is asked to diagnose her sickness, he states that she is suffering from love melancholy, which he believes can be cured only if the Wooer, as Palamon, makes love with her.

The Elizabethans, further, would have been prepared to accept Ophelia as a girl suffering from the effects of love, erotic melancholy (*erotomania*), or a fit of the mother. They knew that "the passive condition of woman kind is subject unto more diseases and of other sortes and natures then men are".⁸ They recognized that "the diverse and violent perturbations which afflict the mind of the Passionate Lover, are the causes of greater mischiefs, then any other passion of the mind whatsoever". "Love is the ground and Principali cause of all

our Affections, and the Abstract of all the Passions and perturbations of the minde. ..." Furthermore, Doctor James Ferrand continues, erotic melancholy is particularly common in women; they are "farre more subject to this passion, and more cruelly tormented with it, then men are". And he notes that "daily experience affords us Examples great store of Women, that are ready to run Mad for Love. ..." ⁹ André du Laurens and John Bishop continue in the same vein, the latter emphasizing the suicidal tendencies of those suffering from erotic melancholy; he states that he believes this disease "to be of all other most painful: seeing that so many [women] do willingly ninne into euerlasting paines of hell fire, by cruelly murdering them selues, that they may thereby escape and rid them from the broyling brendes of *Cupide*. ..." ¹⁰

Ophelia exhibits many of the classical symptoms of *passio hysterica* brought on by *erotomania*. ¹¹ She is mad, cries "hem" to clear her throat because of a feeling of choking or suffocation, beats her heart to relieve the sensation of oppression around it, weeps, prattles constantly, sings snatches of old songs, is distracted and has a depraved imagination, and ends her life by drowning. It is possible that the drowning may not have been deliberate, but at least Ophelia made no attempt to save herself. Though the priest says she is allowed her virgin rites, yet the rites are "maimed" because "her death was doubtful". Dr. Jorden warns that many good physicians are deceived by the symptoms of the disease (such as "*suffocation* in the throate, ... convulsions, hickcockes, laughing, singing, weeping, crying, &c") believing them "to proceede from some metaphysicall power, when in deede ... they are meere naturali."²

Similarly, Dr. Ferrand speaks of the person suffering from *erotomania*: "For you shall see him now very jocund and laughing and presently within a moment he falls a weeping, and is extreame sad: then by againe he entertaines himselfe with some pleasant merry conceipts or other. ... These Perturbations proceed from the Diversity of those objects they fancy to themselves. ... To this we may adde their excessive talking. ..." Finally, in treating the subject of young girls ready for marriage, Dr. Ferrand gives this warning: "For the cure of which Disease [Hippocrates] prescribes speedy Marriages otherwise it is to be feared, that through Madnesse and Impatience, they will make away themselves, either by drowning or hanging; falsely perswading themselves, that by these Remedies, ... being very sure ones, and as they conceive, the best they can finde; they shall set a period to their miseries."¹³ Whatever the exact bature of Ophelia's malady of love, whether it is pure *erotomania* or *passio hysterica* brought on by lovesickness, the symptoms which she exhibits are so clearly portrayed and most of them so easily recognized that the Elizabethan audience, we have reason to suppose, would at least see Ophelia as a girl suffering physically and mentally the pangs of rejected love.¹⁴

Notes

¹ Anna Brownell Jameson, *Shakespeare's Heroines* (London, 1858), p. 257; William Hazlitt, *The Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (London, 1817), p. 111; Edward Strachey, *Shakespeare's Hamlet* (London, 1848), p. 84; A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London, 1951), p. 160.

² Katherine Mansfield: *Hamlet*, ed. John Hampden (London, 1937), p. 182; John Draper, *The Hamlet of Shakespeare's Audience* (Durham, 1938), p. 61; L. L. Schiicking, *The Meaning of Hamlet* (Oxford, 1937), p. 153; Rebecca West, *The Nature of Will* (New Haven, 1957), pp. 21-22; Roderick Benedix, *Die Shakespeareomanie* (Stuttgart, 1873; in *New Variorum Hamlet*, II, appendix); Laurence Babb, "Love Melancholy in the Elizabethan and Early Stuart Drama", *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, XIII (1943), p. 129; G. L. Kittredge, *Sixteen Plays of Shakespeare* (Boston, 1946), p. 1086.

³ Thomas Casper, *The Mystery of Witch-craft* (London, 1617), p.146.

⁴ Mansfield, p. 182.

⁵ Thomas Hanmer, *Some Remarks on the Tragedy of Hamlet* (London, 1736), p. 46.

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⁶ *Othello* IV.iii. 26-57. See *Much Ado* II. i. 124-126, "I offered him my company to a willow-tree, either to make him a Garland, as being forsaken, or to bind him up a rod. ... "; *Merchant of Venice* V. i. 9-10; *Twelfth Night* I. v. 287-288.

⁷ It is interesting that this occurrence is duplicated in *Der Bestrafte Brudermord*—a play in which all agree that Ophelia is mad for love—where Ophelia mistakes Phantasio for her sweetheart and suggests that they go to bed together.

⁸ In discussing the medical aspects of Ophelia's malady, the books I have used are: Edward Jorden, *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother* (London, 1603); James Ferrand, *Erotomania, or A Treatise Discoursing of the Essence, Cause, Symptomes, Prognosticks, and Cure of Love. Or Erotique Melancholy* (Oxford, 1640; 1st French ed., Paris, 1623); Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (New York, 1941); André du Laurens, *Of the Preservation of the Sight* (London, 1599); Tomaso Garzoni, *The Hospital of Incurable Fooles* (London, 1600); Pierre Boaistuau, *Theatrum Mundi* (London, 1581); John Bishop, *Beautiful Blossomes* (London, 1577); Nicolas Coeffeteau, *A Table of Humane Passions* (London, 1621). These first references are to Jorden (sig. B 1) and Ferrand (p. 9).

⁹ Ferrand, pp. 7, 9-10, 214-215; see Coeffeteau, pp. 170-171; Jorden, sig. G2^v ; and Garzoni, p. 151.

¹⁰ Du Laurens, pp. 117-118; Bishop, fol. 52^v .

¹¹ Ferrand, pp. 11, 94-96.

¹² Jorden, sig. B2, El . See Ferrand, pp. 94-97.

¹³ Ferrand, pp. 97, 107-110.

¹⁴ It is rather interesting to note, though perhaps of no significance, that in the discussion of the remedies of love Burton quotes the line, "Young men will do it when they come to it", but without reference to *Hamlet* (p. 736).

Theodore Lidz (essay date 1975)

SOURCE: "Hamlet's Precarious Emotional Balance," in *Hamlet's Enemy: Madness and Myth in Hamlet*, 1975, pp. 60-7.

[In the essay that follows Lidz analyzes Hamlet's madness, including his real and feigned insanities and the conclusions he reaches while in these states.]

The members of the parental generation, having given their advice and orders to Hamlet, Laertes, Ophelia, and Fortinbras, start spying on them in the second act. Two months have elapsed since Hamlet swore to avenge his father; but he has not yet moved "with wings as swift / As meditation or the thoughts of love" (I, v, 29-30). Claudius is still alive, and Hamlet's emotional balance has become precarious during the interlude. We may or may not be aware of his instability, depending on how the role is acted.¹ Indeed, we must rely upon reports from those who are closest to him to learn of the worsening of his condition. In the very first scene of the second act, Ophelia rushes to tell her father that she has just been frightened while sewing in her closet by the

Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced;
No hat upon his head; his stockings foul'd,

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Ungarter'd, and down-gyved to his ancle;
Pale as his shirt; his knees knocking each
other;
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been loosed out of hell
To speak of horrors,

(II, i, 78-83)

and she goes on to describe behavior strange enough to lead Polonius to believe:

This is the very ecstasy of love;
Whose violent property fordoes itself
And leads the will to desperate undertakings,
As oft as any passion under heaven
That does afflict our natures.

(II, i, 102-106)

Even though we know that Hamlet has planned to feign insanity, it seems strange that he does so by entering Ophelia's rooms in so disheveled a condition, or that he would befoul his stockings to carry out the pretense. Perhaps he seeks to hide the meaning of his embittered and melancholic behavior under the guise of being depressed over Ophelia's withdrawal of her affection, but it seems a cruel and deceitful way to treat his beloved. The obedient Ophelia has followed her father's injunctions and repelled Hamlet's letters and denied him access to her. Just at this critical juncture in Hamlet's life, she has let her father come between Hamlet and herself. Polonius is certain that these rebuffs have driven Hamlet mad, and he now hopes that a reconciliation between his daughter and the heir apparent may reclaim Hamlet's wits. His hopes are fortified when he reads the note that Hamlet has sent Ophelia, a confused expression of Hamlet's suffering and his undying love:

O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers. I have not art to reckon my groans; but that I love thee best, O most best, believe it. Adieu.

Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst this machine is to him, HAMLET

(II, ii, 119-123)

The message can be taken either as part of an exaggerated subterfuge or as a threat to commit suicide unless Ophelia relents.

Meanwhile, Gertrude and Claudius have become sufficiently concerned about Hamlet's condition to summon Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to court to distract their son and to find out what is troubling him. The king does not ask them to spy on their friend; rather, he requests them to "glean" whether anything "unknown afflicts him thus, / That, open'd, lies within our remedy" (II, ii, 17-18). Claudius, in greeting Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, tells them of Hamlet's melancholic state, terming it a "transformation," "Sith nor the exterior nor the inward man / Resembles that it was" (II, ii, 6-7).

When Polonius informs the king and queen that he has found the cause of Hamlet's indisposition, it is clear that all three are fully convinced that he is mad. Neither Claudius nor Gertrude takes exception to Polonius' direct statement, "Your noble son is mad" (II, ii, 92), though they are skeptical that it is because Ophelia has refused to see him that he fell into a sadness and finally into "the madness wherein now he raves" (II, ii, 149). Then, when Hamlet appears, Polonius "boards" him, and Hamlet seems neither mad nor even seriously melancholic. He uses the license afforded by his supposed madness to bait Polonius, to display his wit in playing with words and phrases. We have a brief "comic relief—a relief, literally, because our hero's mind

seems very sharp indeed.

Shakespeare has here turned the more customary situation around: the audience is not laughing at the madman; instead, the madman is making his sane interrogator laughable. The trend is feebly apparent in the Saxo and Belleforest versions of the saga in which Amleth, the butt of the courtiers' tricks repeatedly turns the tables on them. Hamlet, however, is more clearly related to the "trickster" of various myths and to the jester, the fool who makes others look foolish.

Hamlet seems to realize that Polonius has prevented Ophelia from seeing him. He advises Polonius that "if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog" (II; ii, 180), he should keep his daughter out of the sun lest she conceive. Polonius thinks Hamlet is "far gone" but considers "How pregnant sometimes his replies are! a happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be delivered of (II, ii, 206-209). The audience now knows that Hamlet's intellect is as keen as ever; but then comes the parting exchange in which Shakespeare lets us know that despite his wit and his intact wits, Hamlet is in a precarious state. When Polonius bids him farewell, "My honourable lord, I will most humbly take leave of you" (II, ii, 210-211), Hamlet replies, "You cannot, sir, take from me any thing that I will more willingly part withal; except my life, except my life, except my life" (II, ii, 212-214).

When Hamlet first meets Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he confirms his unwholesome state of mind. They admit that they are in the court because the king and queen have sent for them, and Hamlet does not need to ask why. He relieves them from betraying a secret by telling them it is because he has of late:

... but wherefore I know not,—lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, ... appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving, how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel! in apprehension, how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? man delights not me;

(II, ii, 288-300)

A little later, however, he confides to them that his uncle-father and his aunt-mother are deceived, for "I am but mad north-north-west; when the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw" (II, ii, 360-361). He is aware that he is being affected by the deceit and hostility of those around him. Shakespeare properly has Hamlet's mood and behavior fluctuate with the feelings aroused in him by those persons who are most significant to him.

The Incitement to Action

Hamlet, then, has been suffering. He has become a tormented soul struggling to survive in a world that has lost its meaning for him, and he scarcely cares if he survives or not. After two months, he has still to carry out his father's bidding. He has difficulty in keeping his mind from being tainted and contriving against his mother; killing his stepfather seems a secondary matter to him. Then, the traveling players—old friends of Hamlet's—arrive at Elsinore. Hamlet bids the First Player give them a foretaste of his artistry with a speech from a play Hamlet admired for its honesty and modesty, even though it "pleased not the million; 'twas caviare to the general" (II, ii, 416). In the speech, Aeneas tells Dido of Priam's slaughter: of how Pyrrhus avenged his father, Achilles; and of how a faithful queen, Hecuba, mourned her husband.² While listening to the Player agonize about Priam and Hecuba, Hamlet is stimulated to move out of the inertia of his melancholy, his indecision, and his feelings that nothing matters to him. His misanthropic mood is apparent. When Polonius tells him that he will use the players "according to their desert," Hamlet chides him, "Use

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every man after his desert, and who should 'scape whipping?" (II, ii, 505-506). This remark led Freud in "Mourning and Melancholia" to write, "For there can be no doubt that if anyone holds and expresses to others an opinion of himself such as this (an opinion which Hamlet held both of himself and everyone else) he is ill, whether he is speaking the truth or whether he is being more or less unfair to himself."³ Thus, we have Freud's opinion of Hamlet's mental state at the close of Act II.

As soon as Hamlet is alone, he tells himself:

Oh what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage wann'd;
Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function
suiting
With forms to his conceit? And all for
nothing!
For Hecuba?
What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her? What would he
do,
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have?

(II, ii, 523-535)

He berates himself for being a "dull and muddy-mettled rascal," who is a "John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause" (II, ii, 541-542) and who, though

Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with
words,
And fall acursing, like a very drab.

(II, ii, 560-562)

While the First Player speaks, however, Hamlet conceives a way out of his uncertainty, a way to make certain that he has not, because of his melancholy, simply hallucinated the ghost's revelations or been tricked by an evil spirit. He has formulated his stratagem for gaining proof of Claudius' guilt: "The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king" (II, ii, 580-581).

Although Hamlet is now ready to test Claudius and take measures to clear the corruption from the court, he remains uncertain whether it is worth taking "arms against a sea of troubles, / And by opposing end them?" (IH, i, 59-60). One alternative is to retain his philosophic perspective and "suffer / The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" (III, i, 57-58). Another is suicide.

To die,—to sleep,—
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache, and the thousand natural
shocks
That flesh is heir to,—'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd.

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(III, i, 60-64)

He ponders that uniquely human problem, the existential dilemma of "to be, or not to be." He is not so obsessed with his father's murder that he must hasten to revenge. He would prefer to turn his back on the whole sorry mess. What does life hold for him? He can kill his uncle. If fortunate, he will assume the throne. But his mother's obliquity will remain with him. Why should he not be much possessed by death? Hamlet, as others who choose the negative answer when they weigh the worth of life and death, finds the balance weighted by his disillusionment with the person whose love was central to his well-being.

Hamlet is aware that he must leave off considering all sides of a question if he is to act heroically. He is considering more than his reasons for not ending his life when he tells himself:

Thus conscience⁴ does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action.

(III, i, 83-88)

He is not the type of Renaissance hero whose life can readily be guided by the need for vengeance or power.

He has been schooled in contemplation. If he is to act, as he has sworn to the ghost he will, he must become impetuous. Later he will even praise rashness: "Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well / When our deep plots do fail" (V, ii, 8-9).

Notes

¹ In his *Heart of Hamlet*, Bernard Grebanier is somehow able to assert that Hamlet neither is insane nor feigns insanity at any time during the play.

² Hamlet's praise of this speech may seem misplaced, and many readers would tend to agree with Polonius, who is bored by it. However, Shakespeare was consistent in having a university student, Hamlet, admire a classic play. Shakespeare took as a model and improved a passage from Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, that may well have been written by Nash after Marlowe's death. It is far from a "modest" speech. However, the questionable artistic merit of the speech should not let us neglect its importance both in furthering the movement of *Hamlet*, and also in setting a mood by inveighing against that strumpet, Fortune.

³ S. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey, vol. 14, pp. 246-247.

⁴ Consciousness or inmost thought.

P. J. Aldus (essay date 1977)

SOURCE: "Madness," in *Mousetrap: Structure and Meaning in Hamlet*, 1977, pp. 209-19.

[In the following excerpt, Aldus investigates the madness of Hamlet on a mythical level, exploring his "poetic" madness as a projection of Shakespeare himself and the prince as a paranoid schizophrenic]

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POLONIUS Though this be madness, yet there is method in't.

... a happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be delivered of.

Hamlet embodies an involved combination of many identities, but the awkward, sometimes cumbersome terminologies used here for them (e.g., King/Polonius/ Hamlet) scarcely help gain response to mythic character and action. The *reductio ad absurdum*, however accurate the term might be, would be a composite name stretching its length a third of a page.

The usual alternative, each figure accepted by name as literal character in a literal story, is even worse. But it will have been noticed that there has been here a compromise, awkward terminologies giving way from time to time to the simple 'literal' names. Readers probably share the feeling that this aspect of the study is unsatisfactory, for indeed any such use of the names *per se* is invitation to a literal perspective, the same problem that disturbed the responses of Greg, Wilson, Granville-Barker, Eliot, and others. Even with this limitation, which may have been Shakespeare's problem too, it may be that the inventive structure of the play makes acceptance of the complex character of Hamlet inescapable.

The difficulty was not enough to discourage Greg from the belief that *Hamlet* may be so powerful a poem as to be beyond the art of the stage, but possibly apprehensible through reading. Yet Shakespeare relied on a stage a large part of which was the full imaginative participation of much of an audience more sensitive than we to metaphoric implications in language, character, and patterns of action.

If so, our final problem is to attempt to set forth some approximating equivalent pattern which will allow fuller response to the shifting, blending identity that is the unrelenting unity of Hamlet's agony. Perhaps a brief review of 'madnesses' in Plato's sense of the term, lying at the heart of human experience, may be helpful towards a final understanding of Hamlet, of *Hamlet*, and of a major element in Shakespeare's invention.

By Plato's standard that the use of myths is part of invention *Hamlet* has not been found wanting. But, although marked by large interwoven patterns of extant myths and enriched by allusions to particular myths within these traditions, the play yet must provide another mode of invention if Shakespeare is to satisfy Plato's concept of the true poet: he must be able to make a myth within which all poetic powers show themselves, including the significant incorporation of the mythic past. He must be able to construct, as the whole, a metaphor that is total, a language for truth (as far as man may experience it) of a different kind than the rational.

So extraordinary is this kind of imitation that it can be apprehended only imperfectly and vaguely by the literal power of reason. It is beyond paraphrase, beyond rational equivalent; its quality can be approximated only by example, by a corresponding metaphoric statement, another myth; but this will yet be something different, for the only correlative to a myth is itself in the understanding of him who reads, and in dramatic myth who sees and hears it. Another way of trying to put this is to say that the *Hamlet* myth provides fullness of meaning to the extent that the private myth brought to the play corresponds to it, a private myth which at the same time must be a universal myth.

Such myth-making, says Plato, comes about in the poet who is 'possessed,' who is in a state of holy or divine madness. Such madness is not, or need not be, although it always seems metaphorically akin to, madness in the ordinary sense. An exploration of this element in *Hamlet* may help resolve the awkwardnesses in attempts here to convey the multiple-single character of Hamlet. Such inquiry will be clearer if it is approached by a brief reconsideration of Plato's definitions of several kinds of divine madness.

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At this point it should be quite obvious that what we are about to consider has nothing to do with the quite irrelevant inquiry as to whether Hamlet is mad or feigns madness—a question that could become relevant if the point were raised whether Shakespeare wished to create a dramatic character representing one or the other state (or both, for that matter). As usually put, the question postulates a sane man (not a dramatic character) pretending to be mad, or a man once sane now mad; the assumption is extra-metaphoric, extrapoetic; it is predicated on the play as a literal action measurable by a mankind which is sane or 'normal.' Mythic man is, of course, if most uncomfortable company, quite normal in nature, however mad in conventional society.

Here madness will be approached in Plato's terms as a condition required for myth, or in Aristotle's terms as character good for the action of a drama. If the action requires madness, the poet supplies madness in whatever degree or form, when, and where it may be needed, just as he gives extra-mortal or extra-historical creatures a 'local habitation and a name.'

All four of Plato's divine madresses are extreme; they are ideal forms of human power represented by gods or agents of gods. Hamlet gives evidence in what he says and in action of being possessed by each of these forces. There is prophetic madness, lying finally, for example, in the *Oedipus* in Apollo, and directly evident in Teiresias, the blind seer, who too could have exclaimed, 'O, my prophetic soul!' There is the madness of divine healing: 'Again, where plagues and mightiest woes have bred in certain families, owing to some ancient blood-guiltiness, there madness has entered with holy prayers and rites, and by inspired utterances found a way of deliverance for those who are in need ...' Hamlet is less cheerful; he curses the spite that he has been born to set evils right.

Of lust Plato intimates that, if one believes it to be a simple madness (i.e., an indivisible state of evil), one might accept it. But he says there is 'also a madness which is a divine gift ... [this] madness of love is the greatest of heaven's blessings ...' Hamlet is on a line between these compulsive twin states. He has lost the second (although he yearns for it), is slave to the first.

The fourth, poetic madness, is the most interesting in *Hamlet*, for it suggests, through Hamlet's character as poet/dramatist/actor (with all its associated powers) a special application of precisely these powers in Shakespeare as he invents the profoundly searching myth that enters us as audience at the same time that it is an endlessly receding vision. While there is no reason whatever to conjecture about Shakespeare's attitude towards himself, and even less what he may have been in terms of the madresses of prophecy, healing, or love-lust (although he presumably expressed himself as to the last in the sonnets), there is no way of escaping his use of himself, just as he uses the Globe theatre, as a richly provocative element in *Hamlet*.

The possibilities for ambiguities, reflections, images, shadows, enigma pressing from all sides, the curious, dreadful sense of unreality, of phantasmagoria, a universe of dream-desolation, are infinitely enhanced by sophisticated use of the art of illusion. Add to it an inventive extension of the ordinary concept of madness into an extraordinary mythic madness in Hamlet and the combinations and permutations become well-nigh endless. That Hamlet is a courtier, young lover, prince, scholar, soldier, hunter, spy, challenger, challenged, prophet, man of desire, corrupt man, diseased man, scourge, self-scourge—that he is all these at once and at the same time is poet-dramatist—carries complexities beyond any full assessment; add Hamlet's definition of his Ghost/Father/Self as Apollo, Jove, Mars, Mercury—indeed every god—and we do have essential man, primal man, somehow contained in the all-embracing memory of the most sophisticated of Renaissance figures.

There remains then one matter: how Shakespeare uses madness, in its ordinary sense as he may have understood it, by extending its implications, its power in represented extremes, as dramatic means.

That Shakespeare knew a good deal about madness in the usual sense of insanity can be believed from both external fact and internal evidence from the plays. Elizabethan England was notably lax in its attitudes towards the insane. Some were locked in Bethlehem, and perhaps other such places; far more walked the

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roads of England and the streets of London freely. The plays show that Shakespeare was very aware of their vivid excesses in speech and action. Beyond a fairly extensive roster of eccentrics of many kinds, there is an inarticulate Othello mouthing his passionate distraction; a 'Tom o' Bedlam' echoing the cosmic madness of Lear, after the madman's lesser echo, the Fool, has beat his anguished heart out for his possessed 'nuncle.' These of course are no more examples of literal madness than is Hamlet.

Mental distractions did not then have the terminologies now attached to them, but they were there; we have no new madresses. There is little point in trying to categorize an Othello, a Lear, or a Hamlet in such terms. There is much point in recognizing one or another insanity to see how Shakespeare, having observed it and absorbed its phenomena and its artistic potential, used it, as all else, for the ends of dramatic myths, especially in one about a cosmic madhouse-prison. Thus the terms *schizophrenia* and *paranoia* are most useful in attempting some assessment of poetic madness that shapes the colossally obsessed and disturbed Hamlet.

Other literary myths lend their support. Through a rather simple, mechanical device (yet with power) Robert Louis Stevenson has given us the frightening evil of Hyde destroying his twin self and thus himself. In a novel reflecting Melville's deep absorption in Shakespeare the story of Ahab, twin of an evil Moby Dick, is told by Ishmael through the overwhelming three days of final destruction, only to have the telling begin again by an Ishmael who survives in a coffin. There are more; indeed all tragic heroes are tragic heroes by virtue of deep ambivalence, enigmatic paradox within, although they are not always invented in terms of obvious parallel to madness.

Hamlet is not represented as alternating between two characters, unless we choose to stop with Horatio/Hamlet. His character is shown in perpetual sea-change, a Protean image unequalled anywhere in mythic-poetic art. Yet it seems reasonable to postulate the fact of schizophrenia as preliminary to attempts to formulate metaphoric parallels to Hamlet in the prison of his mind. We may best begin by remembering, as Edith Hamilton points out, 'the uncertainty between good and evil ... in every one of the deities,' and by noting the classic pattern of what is termed schizophrenia.

In general terms the schizophrenic is caught up in a pattern like that of the primal myth-maker. It seems likely that the latter, from a state of direct response to intimations and forms of meanings in surrounding phenomena that appeared to correspond to his emotional, physical, and psychological forces, became gradually a qualifier of his self-understanding through conscious consideration of formal realities in such phenomena. The schizophrenic, on the other hand, is compelled in the dominating 'mad' half of his identity to an inflexible vision which absorbs all that he sees, hears, touches, smells, tastes into his world of private reality. Even here there appears to be a likeness. Many invented gods are counterparts, and the story, no matter in what myth it may appear, varies only in accidentals; its basic pattern remains constant. The myth-maker varies the particulars and eventually, in literary myth, controls an elaborate combination of past myths, whereas the schizophrenic has no such control; he has no choice; his compulsion forces any and all particulars into whatever *idée fixe* it is that shackles him. Again even this has its relevance to the true mythmaker,



Act III, scene i. Kenneth Branagh as Hamlet in his 1996 film adaptation.

who is, or cannot help but be, totally faithful to the compelling, controlling unity of the vision he expresses in art.

There are other general considerations. The schizophrenic's other 'sane' self is often indistinguishable from 'normal' man, just as poet-vases need not be extreme in conduct, except as he may have been (or is) involved in actual ritual. Too, both have exactly the same phenomena to respond to; only their essential selves may have differences. Shakespeare had his profession, the Globe, the Renaissance world, a great deal of the past in memory, and his own experience and inner states to qualify his myth-making. So too the schizophrenic may have varying internal and external conditions and influences to identify him. But in basic elements all myth-makers and all schizophrenics are, respectively, the same: each has a universal form. What makes the whole consideration here extraordinary is that Shakespeare is a poet 'possessed' in Plato's sense, inventing a figure who is not only like an unendingly multiple schizophrenic, but also a possessed poet/dramatist/actor within the fiction.

From these general elements we may now briefly note what appear to be relevant particulars in schizophrenia.

The schizophrenic, when he talks (and typically talks beyond restraint except for periods of mute depression), tells his story to its end only to begin again, and yet again. He is caught in an interminable revelation of self through any and all phenomena of the reality he feels and sees. He is most often in a state of suspicion; he is surrounded by spies who intend him harm, even to kill him, and therefore he must spy on everyone and seek to kill. As spies, others are hunting him; in defence, he must hunt them. The ambivalence makes defence offence; he is always, when in the paranoid state, an imminently potential killer. Given his double, opposed character, he becomes the spy/hunter turned on himself, the potential self-killer. He battles his own vision.

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He is given to arrogance (or an arrogant humility) which often expresses itself in identity with Christ as sacrificial victim (or self-offered sacrifice). This arrogant identity may equally be with a god or gods or any other figure of great power, and especially of sacrifice. The paranoid quality is locked to the arrogance, which is often violent, always potentially so. He is also often obsessed by the compulsive power of sex.

King/Hamlet speaks of Hamlet's

... confusion,
Grating so harshly all his days of quiet
With turbulent and dangerous lunacy.

The Queen says,

And thus a while the fit will work on him.
Anon ...

His silence will sit drooping.

This is precisely descriptive of the manic-depressive form of schizophrenia.

Too, the intelligent schizophrenic is extraordinarily skilled in the cunning guile of guileless imitation of sanity. He can be so persuasive in this as to be most dangerous. He is often extremely articulate, fluency and wit combining in an air of artful innocence. He can set forth his assumed character with as much modesty as cunning.

One is led to believe or entertain the belief that, insofar as all of the schizophrenic's enemies—the spies, the hunters, the ever-present threatening killers—are extensions of his own distorted dream, he may in some strange subconscious way be aware of this duality, aware that all is a twin-imaged projection of self-compulsion. But whether this be true in fact or not, it can be made a movingly true fiction by a myth-maker inventing some ultimate form of schizophrenia to 'catch the conscience of the king.' If so, we may expect him to invent many 'twins,' even multiple sets of identical twins. One thinks of Horatio/Hamlet, of King/Polonius; back of these the indistinguishable Rosencrantz/ Guildenstern, and back of these their lesser shadows, Cornelius/Voltemand; one thinks of Pyrrhus/Fortinbras; of Bernardo/Osric as challengers; and several more; all finally surrounding in near and receding images the centre—the anguished soul of Hamlet. There is further the twin form of Ophelia/Queen.

These identities are not individual, either in the structure of the play or in the character of Hamlet. There are mergings, overlappings, modulations; indistinguishable shiftings: two become one, three become one or two, and so on variously; all, although they seem to move outwardly, move to a concentric Hamlet. The 'schizophrenic' repetitions of the story, single, interwoven, divided but combined, narrated, intimated, mimed, acted out, presented in symbol and ritual, do not at all interrupt the literal dramatic narrative which has so long beguiled those caught in the Hamlet web.

There is no satisfactory way of attempting to say how Shakespeare managed to create such a figure. But, beginning with Hamlet's own metaphors (invented by Shakespeare), through metaphoric use of those we see literally as 'madmen,' 'schizophrenics,' caught in the wards of the prisons of their 'Elsinores,' we may hazard some sense of the power of *Hamlet*, and from this, perhaps, respond more fully to Shakespeare's myth.

Our introduction to this other world comes from Hamlet. He has been in a happy, beautiful world, only to find that

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I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth ... it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire—why, it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours.

This desolate subjective state he has indicated in significant terms just before:

HAM What have you, my good friends,
deserved at the hands of Fortune that she
sends you to prison hither?
GUIL Prison, my lord?
HAM Denmark's a prison.
ROS Then is the world one.
HAM A goodly one; in which there are many
confines, wards, and dungeons, Denmark
being one o' th' worst.
ROS We think not so, my lord.
HAM Why, then 'tis none to you; for there is
nothing either good or bad but thinking
makes it so. To me it is a prison.

Or again, in his Ghost identity, he speaks of the 'secrets of my prison house' which are so dreadful that they may not be revealed. Or again, 'perchance to dream: ... aye, there's the rub! / For in that sleep of death what dreams may come / ... Must give us pause.' But this, the prison of death, filled with mad and frightening dreams, with fearful threatening shadows moving about and towards him endlessly in a *walpurgis* night, is not an imagined thing for Hamlet: although he debates in his ambiguity whether he should risk going there, he is already, without choice, in this purgatory, this dreadful and bitter prison house. He has died out of it only to be reborn into it in the brief breath of 'Long live the King,' endlessly accompanied by a troop of spirits who, emanating from himself, hedge him about with revulsion and terror.

In this invented madhouse prison wanders the invented madman Man; we are irresistibly drawn to imprisonment with him in the Globe, whether we read, or see and hear, mutes and audience to the act. Whatever compassionate, fearful empathy we may ever have felt, or feel, for the paranoid-schizophrenic and his troop of accompanying spirits, whether it were or be in our own sad, doomed family, or in the family that surrounds us to the furthest reaches of our known world—always beyond it the reaches of silence—this response can be only most imperfectly approximated by literal-metaphoric equivalents. But they may help in an assessment of the art of *Hamlet*. As metaphors schizophrenic-paranoids imprisoned in their frightful worlds are paradigm for lost man; in the Hamlet vision universal man.

Here is confined a distracted young lover, fearful and resentful of interference by a father. This may be the father of the woman whose affection he shares, or, in his compulsive confusions, her brother; or the husband of a woman beyond the strictures of convention if not nature, a mother, wanting whom is a terrifying violation. This feeling is confined in a nutshell; it presses severely on the mind, the cumulative force of all of woman, all of man in conflict over woman who will take any man to satisfy nature's need for procreation. In these 'foul imaginings' all men are dangerous, all women are a desolating temptation to the gross, violating act, the urgencies towards which lie no less within himself.

In another cell paces a young man who has been a soldier, in reality or in imagination, in Hal / Henry's words one who will 'imitate the action of the tiger; / Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood, / Disguise fair nature with hard-favour'd rage; / Then lend the eye a terrible aspect ... The gates of mercy shall be all shut up, / And

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the flesh'd soldier rough and hard of heart, ... shall range / With conscience wide as hell, mowing like grass / Your fresh fair virgins ... / What is't to me ... / If your pure maidens fall into the hand / Of hot and forcing violation?' (*Henry V* III.i.6-9; iii. 10-21 *passim*). He is, in short, a Pyrrhus, a Mars, who is a terrifying violator.

Or here is a hunter, a skilled falconer, an expert in pursuing the stag and deer with hounds, exercising his cunning to overtake or drive out of hiding his prey. His hunting image may give way spontaneously to that of horsemanship: not only 'let the stricken deer go weep,' but also 'let the gall'd jade winch,' an identity that may go through sea-change to become Death, the centaur, if he is at all a scholar.

Or he may be any or all of these yet have been scholar first—a university student, contemplator of self, of man and eternity, in chaotic-ordered estimates of the bitter complexities and limitations of man against imponderable forces. These he expresses in frantic repetition to himself (within the hearing of other madmen) in a series of choruses to his forever excoriatingly futile act to solve his private dilemma. Or again he may be a politically important figure, one on whose choice—a madman without choice—'depends / The safety and health of this whole state ...' His state can be his family, an Elsinore, a Denmark, a world.

These several figures, and more, drooping in their cells, or walking, watched, in their wards, are in an identical outward world: the same doors, and stairs, and lobbies; the same walls and battlements; the same institutional head, the same orderlies and guards. The same visitors: fathers, mothers, old companions. Outside can be seen the same casual figures, man and woman, of any street: a company on military drill, two lovers under a tree, two guards; farther away, two soldiers walking towards him. Dawn; a dazzlingly beautiful spring day; a breathless star-filled snow-cold night. Fireflies; gray-clad storms; roosters crowing; wisps and clouds of fog. A painting of a great castellated fort where cliffs beetle over a raging sea. On some wall, or hung around the neck, family pictures or miniatures. In the near distance the sound of cannon for military observance, accompanying the laughter of a group of visitors. A cross in a chapel. Screaming violence, bloody oaths, an attempted killing, a killing, a rape, a priest, a black confining cell from which waking is to the same doors, and stairs, and lobbies, and walls, and a troop of threatening faces all his own, and all again and again and again. And again.

But none of these things need be actually around him, except perhaps the people, and finally not even these. He brings all with him from his past. Mnemosyne is his familiar. And when he lives and dies and lives at the centre of the round-walled Elsinore of the Globe, he has another familiar, the myth-maker of whom Plato has said, 'the vulgar deem him mad,' who can trans-literate him into total myth.

This image both divides Hamlet and is most incomplete. But we may from this limited division possibly sense something of the synthesis which is one of the great inventive powers in the play. What action these separately identified schizophrenics might see is not indifferent. Each need not be postulated; whatever one sees is seen by any other in his own defined character and context: the particulars vary, the essence is constant. It may be better not to take the simplest form; certainly we cannot take the most inclusive.

He sits in a ward generally occupied. He sees and hears the director of the institution, distinctively dressed, issuing orders to two orderlies, identically dressed, to go to another ward where a young patient is overtly threatening to kill the director and seize his wife, or his chief nurse. Strangely, director, orderlies, other attendants, various vague figures, all remind him of someone he knows—his own face in a mirror. Moments later two orderlies enter his cell; they are apparently different, but his cunning mind seizes the deception: they are the same two sent to spy on, to punish sorely, to kill the threatening young man—who is himself. Suddenly it is apparent that they too are identical in appearance, twins—and identical with himself. But the director has somehow been murdered by the dangerous madman spied on and has been succeeded by his brother. There are visitors, or inmates—a young woman, an older woman; they are at once his mother and a girl he has seduced or who has seduced him. They are joined by the girl's father and brother, but the first is the same as the director's brother, and the latter again the mirror image of himself; the father no less image of the

murdered director and the succeeding brother. Now suddenly seduced girl and mother come into his view: they are identical. He attacks both as each, for in some confused way he would not be locked in this desolate nightmare had they not tempted him to the violent compulsive act that incarcerates him in his purgatorial prison. In this kaleidoscopic dream he fights a twin, is killed by the other, kills the other, kills a mother and father, then wakes to the agony of the whole tormented nightmare again.

What we have thus far sought to imagine becomes far more complicated by all the confusing yet relevant cross-complexities and particulars that are interfused through the characters of hunter, spy, soldier, scholar, courtier, prince, and all the others, each of whom sees phenomena in his own way. But in Shakespeare's poetic invention all are seen at once, all act and speak at once, in one figure; there is no rational division possible. The whole figure is, beyond ordinary conception, one figure whose 'hallucinations,' never cancelling each other, create the obsessed, mad Hamlet who bears all of the desolations that destroy man.

The invention in *Hamlet* seems to be something like this, infinitely magnified to create the play's power. But Shakespeare's art does not end here. In a sense it begins here, for the ultimate power in *Hamlet* is that of poetry and the theatre, of the total illusion which challenges what may be dreamed of as ultimate truth. The Hamlet figure is illusionary placed within illusion, inventor of illusion within illusion, chief illusory actor within the illusion, surrogate for the master of illusion who created him—the possessed poet working in the illusory world of the Globe, circled by England and 'this side of our known world,' by Christ and Satan, by the desolated Garden, by God and his angels, by Apollo and Diana, Jove and Hera, and, in some strange silent terminus, by Gaea-Ouranos, Earth and Sky.

Duncan Salkeld (essay date 1993)

SOURCE: "Dangerous conjectures: Madness in Shakespearean Tragedy," in *Madness and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*, 1993, pp. 80-115.

[In the excerpt below, Salkeld describes the political dimension of madness in Hamlet, as indicative of the power of subversion.]

Madness seems to belong in English Renaissance tragedy. It lends a distinctive pathos of inexorable self-destruction to plays which might otherwise be merely violent. But madness in the age of Shakespeare was not merely a playwright's Senecan device. It was put to more sophisticated uses. In the first place, its personal and moral implications were enormous. Madness signified a terrible loss since it rendered the body useless. The punishment of the soul in hell would be more comprehensible since it would reflect the unerring judgement of God. Men and women must accept their fate. Madness, however, belongs to the present world where its suffering takes place among unspeakable cruelties. It is more agonising than hell because the loss attaches itself to the living. Madness is not a consequence of sin, like judgement, but contemporaneous with it, deferring judgement even for the most determined villain. But the insane in Renaissance tragedy were not merely victims of a brutal society; they were also violent, murderous and politically dangerous. Blood may have blood, as the revenge maxim went, but madness will have blood too. Recognition of this fact seems to have made the control of mad people by the authorities both in and outside the dramas an increasingly urgent consideration... .

In *Hamlet* (1601),⁷ madness takes the form of paranoia, breeding in palace rooms in an atmosphere of whispers, suspicion, secrecy and confinement. Concealment has always a subversive potential, and it is out of the obscurity of Hamlet's resentment that the threat of revenge is pressed against Claudius. Denmark is from the start in a state of shock and confusion. The whole place seems mad. To the melancholy Prince, the world is a prison, 'a goodly one in which there are many confines, wards and dungeons, Denmark being one o' the worst' (II.ii.245-6). Its inmates, says Claudius, are 'the distracted multitude, who like not in their judgement

but in their eyes' (IV.iii.4-5). According to Horatio, 'The very place puts toys of desperation ... into every brain' (I.iv.75-6). Chateaubriand called the play 'that tragedy of maniacs, that Royal Bedlam, in which every character is either crazed or criminal, in which feigned madness is added to real madness, and in which the grave itself furnishes the stage with the skull of a fool'.⁸ The question of madness preoccupies the drama as one of its central themes. Hamlet hints that he has 'that within which passes show' but never unambiguously reveals what he holds within the hollow prison of his flesh. The madness remains a question, defined by Polonius as a question: 'Your noble son is mad. / Mad call I it, for to define true madness, / What is't but to be nothing else but mad?' (II.ii.92-4). Above all, it remains a political question. It is important to remember that Hamlet's madness is not a problem of what is going on inside the character's 'mind'. As Francis Barker suggests, the play anticipates the Cartesian moment when the soul or mind would be decisively separated from the body but lacks the discourse to articulate that knowledge. The Prince will not be put on the couch and made to tell all: talk of Hamlet's mind must be historically specific, and anyway, he goes to some lengths to obscure his rationality. Similarly, the cause of Hamlet's delay is not something for criticism to explain since most of the soliloquies are taken up with asking precisely that question. As Harry Levin and Maynard Mack remind us, the questions are more important than the answers.⁹ Madness explains nothing about the Prince's psychology but forms part of the wider political conflict which is the play's main concern.

The play's crisis of sovereignty is marked by a power vacuum created by the death of Old Hamlet. Denmark has two kings, one dead and one fake, neither of whom can rule effectively. One warns and forebodes; the other plots and schemes. But no one rules. Claudius tries to do so but by murdering his King and brother he has violated the very legitimacy and sanction of sovereignty itself. Killing the King has wider effects, as Macbeth also discovers, than a mere change of monarch. Murder does violence to the State, and not even the ghosts of the dead, with all their remembered virtue, can restore the golden age that has been lost. The ghost in *Hamlet* 'com'st in such a questionable shape' (IV.iv.43) that it throws all into doubt: the murder, the marriage, the madness and the revenge. The crisis of sovereignty of which it tells is compounded further by Hamlet's thought that the ghost may be an evil genius: 'the devil hath power / T'assume a pleasing shape, yea, and perhaps I ... abuses me to damn me' (II.ii.595-6). Kings may indeed turn out to be devils. Throughout the play, Hamlet struggles to address two areas of doubt: first, regarding the veracity of the ghost and, second, the guilt of Claudius. The fear and uncertainty with which the play begins stems from the crisis of sovereignty figured in the regicide. The tense responses to the question 'Who's there?' nervously called out in the dark, betray the insecurity of Hamlet's world. The appearance of the ghost dwells on the sentries' minds more than the prospect of war: 'Is not this something more than fantasy? What think you on 't?' (I.i.57-8). Horatio shares their unease if not their superstition: 'This bodes some strange eruption to our state' (I.i.67-72).

The two kings in the first two scenes of Act One give iconic representation to a contradiction of sovereignty. From the outset, the drama is in crisis. The deep uncertainty of the guards has its roots in the death of Old Hamlet. Effectively, what Claudius put to death in the poisoning of his brother amounted to more than the King's two bodies. It gave the fatal wound to the legitimacy of the myth of absolute sovereignty: 'The cess of majesty / Dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw / What's near it with it' (III.iii. 15-17). So the play begins in a political vacuum, a 'gulf, filled only by the vaporous memory of a golden past, and a toy monarch who as early as the second act realises that the game might well be up. The change from order to disorder is not dramatised in the play because the myth of order was in fact never a reality. The act of rupture or contradiction, the killing of the old King, is dispersed throughout the text, in ghost's testimony, in the dumb show and Claudius's prayer, to form the truth which on which the revenge narrative depends. The original moment of disorder is thus occluded, projected behind the horizon of the ghost's emergence. What matters, as the sentries remind each other (I.i.83ff), is that the old myth of sovereignty has died with the King. And yet that ancient rule retains a haunting presence, a ghostly semi-existence in the sham of monarchy which Claudius attempts to enforce but cannot sustain.

Claudius as King embodies the contradiction of sovereignty since it is that royalist ideology he has denied. The division is most keenly felt in the prayer scene where he strives, 'like a man to double business bound',

with ambition and remorse. But it is felt, also, within the social body as Claudius cynically admits: 'our whole kingdom ... contracted in one brow of woe' (I.ii.3-4). Ironically, the trope of the 'body politic' is here invoked by Claudius as a means of shoring up his power. James used it for virtually the same reason. Claudius handles it superbly with Laertes: 'The head is not more native to the heart, the hand more instrumental to the mouth, than is the throne of Denmark to thy father. What wouldst thou have Laertes?' (I.ii.47-9). In the same scene, Laertes lectures his sister on the doubtfulness of Hamlet's affection: 'for on his choice depends the sanity and health of this whole state' (I.iii.20-1). But the body metaphor serves equally to subvert the dominant power. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern let the truth out in a particularly telling Freudian slip: 'Never alone did the King sigh, but with a general groan' (III.iii.22-3). The sighing and groaning recall for Claudius the expirations of the dying King, and the emptying of power from Denmark which that death incurred. It is little wonder that Claudius's reponse is curtly dismissive: 'Arm you, I pray you, to this speedy voyage, / For we will fetters put about this fear, / Which now goes too free-footed' (11. 24-5).

Metaphors of sickness and disease in the play convey the danger of subversion. When Claudius ironically grieves that the State is 'out of joint and out of frame', or stresses the urgency of meeting Hamlet's threat in the words 'He's lov'd of the distracted multitude ... Diseases desperate grown by desperate appliance are relieved', the body trope serves as the concept by which the contest for power may be obliquely acknowledged. Hamlet himself uses the trope as a means of attack and evasion when Rosencrantz asks what he has done with Polonius's body. He replies, 'The body is with the King, but the King is not with the body. The King is a thing—.' 'A thing, my Lord?' asks Guildenstern. 'Of nothing', Hamlet responds (IV.ii.26-9). The head has been severed from the nation. And sovereignty is dead; a thing of nothing. A King without a body, as James well understood and as his son, Charles, would discover to his cost, is indeed nothing. But Hamlet's words cut deeper in subverting the empty politics of the moment with the body metaphor. He explains in true malcontent fashion 'how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar' (IV.iii.30-1). The comment turns inside out a political hierarchy that has already lost its validity and power. The idea of a real and almost total collapse of power relations envisioned in such remarks must have been almost unthinkable for the Elizabethan and Jacobean audience. Though not completely so perhaps, for James went to considerable lengths to put the idea out of parliamentary minds.

The play refers to a variety of kinds of madness. Horatio dismisses talk of the ghost as the guard's 'fantasy' (Li.26) and fears that Hamlet 'waxes desperate with imagination' (I.i.87). The Prince himself confesses to 'bad dreams', a 'sore distraction' and 'madness' (V.ii.225). His 'antic disposition' (I.v.180) is variously interpreted by Claudius as 'Hamlet's transformation' (II.ii.5), 'Hamlet's lunacy' or 'distemper' (II.ii.49, 55), 'this confusion' and 'turbulent and dangerous lunacy' (III.i.2,4). Claudius and the court remain in some doubt as to Hamlet's real state of mind. Polonius regards Hamlet as the stock mad lover of Elizabethan literature ('this is the very ecstasy of love', II.i.102, cf. III.i.162). Gertrude is convinced of her son's madness despite his disclaimer, 'That I essentially am not in madness, but mad in craft' (III.iv. 189-90). Ophelia becomes 'importunate, indeed distract'. Claudius, with remarkable foresight, regards her as a perfect example of the Lacanian split subject, 'Divided from herself and her fair judgement' (IV.v.85). Through the diversity of these terms, the meaning of madness is displaced in the text, scattered across the strategies of resistance and revenge. The madness is part of the complex game Hamlet plays: as prince and fool, he uses it both to resist Claudius's sovereignty, and to evade the revenge encounter at the same time. Hamlet's madness, like any other, resists interpretation. The play itself, apart from the critics, fosters controversy over the issue. Is he mad? How much does he feign? The questions remain undecidable, as Maynard Mack has concluded: 'Even the madness itself is riddling: How much is real? How much is feigned? What does it mean? Sane or mad, Hamlet's mind plays restlessly about his world, turning up one riddle upon another'.¹⁰ Like his father, Hamlet appears 'in questionable shape' (I.iv.43). He appears first quite mad, with his 'wild and whirling words' issuing from a 'distracted globe', and then, penetratingly sane. Even Polonius is puzzled by his 'pregnant' replies, the method in the madness. He toys with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern like the fool setting verbal traps to outwit his fellows. He changes between the types of a 'Tom o' Bedlam' and a 'John-a-dreams'. As Hamlet struggles to comprehend his situation, the occasions when he is merely joking and when deadly serious become increasingly difficult to

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distinguish. In the confusion, even the tragic form of the play can be lost. In her report of Hamlet's raid on her closet (II.i.73-80), Ophelia describes the ridiculous appearance of the Prince, his 'stocking's foul'd', his legs 'ungarter'd and down-gyved', his 'knees knocking each other', and 'a look so piteous in purport as if he had been loosed out of hell to speak of horrors'. The description echoes Malvolio's 'midsummer madness', and serves only to confirm Polonius in his suspicions. Hamlet at Ophelia's door, down-gyved and madly staring, presents a figure of comedy, a Pyramus who kills himself most gallant for love, a 'contemplative idiot'. But there is real violence in the appearance, for it terrifies the 'affrighted' Ophelia (II.i.103).

The madness of the Prince, real or feigned, is produced out of contradictory forces in the play. As Hamlet struggles with the 'mighty opposites' of conflicting loyalties, he becomes a site of contradiction, entrapped within what Foucault terms a 'space of indecision'.¹¹ Claudius, in the prayer scene, feels himself caught in a similar dilemma but ultimately knows the path he will take:

Pray I cannot,
Though inclination be as sharp as will,
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,
And, like a man to double business bound,
I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
And both neglect.

(III.iii.38-43).

Struggling to choose, he is all 'the more engaged'. Eventually the decision is made for him, since 'words without thoughts never to heaven go' (III.iii.98). Hamlet's dilemma is not so easily resolved. He is addressed by two worlds, the 'sterile promontory' and the 'undiscover'd country', two kings and two fathers. In his indecision, trapped between the 'incensed points' of being and not-being, Prince Hamlet becomes a 'dull and muddy-mettled rascal', the 'paragon of animals' and yet 'the quintessence of dust'. Gertrude describes him as a site of conflict: 'Mad as the sea and wind when both contend which is mightier' (IV.i.7-8). As Prince and 'peasant slave', Hamlet embodies a contra-diction that divests him of the power to act or decide. It is within this space between mighty opposites that the madness of Hamlet is played out: 'What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves all, believe none of us' (III.i. 128-9). It is only in the final act, on return from England, that he appears to have made his choice: 'The interim is mine' (V.ii.73). For on it depends the sanity and health of all Denmark.

The contradiction Hamlet embodies is not simply a dramatic aporia, a kind of textual apoplexy. As Mad Prince, Hamlet enacts the incoherences of the Renaissance ideology of sovereignty. For Hamlet, the entire question of life hangs on what is 'nobler in the mind'. Horatio's warning about the ghost ('What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord, / ... And there assume some other horrible form / Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason / And draw you into madness', I.iv.73-4) shows keen foresight. When Hamlet dismisses Ophelia to a nunnery or brothel, Ophelia cries, 'O what a noble mind is here o'erthrown ... that noble and most sovereign reason, like sweet bells jangled out of tune and harsh' (III.i. 150-61). Madness does not function in the play as a theoretical abstraction. It is neither passive nor silent. Madness strays at the brink, confronts the monstrous, and resounds in the ears of its witnesses.

The subversive power of madness is made clear by Ophelia's 'dangerous conjectures'. It is through madness that Ophelia eventually 'comes out' and insanity makes of her an 'importunate', assertive and dangerous figure. A gentleman warns that though 'Her speech is nothing, / yet the unshaped use of it doth move / the hearers to collection. They aim at it, / And botch the words up to fit their own thoughts' (IV.v.7-10). Ophelia's 'distraction' (the word suggests being drawn in different directions), signalled visually in winks, nods, gestures and her hair down, is produced by the dangerous vicissitudes of revenge and presents a further threat to Claudius's already failing rule. Horatio cautions Gertrude, 'Twere good she were spoken with, for she may strew dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds' (IV.v.14-15). Suddenly, the dutiful daughter has become a

witch, a speaker of mysteries. Claudius has some experience of mad persons and shares Horatio's concern, though for different reasons. He promptly orders her surveillance: 'Follow her close; give her good watch, I pray you' (IV.v.74). The change in Ophelia is marked. In the early scenes of the play, she promises to turn out as the kind of victim of Elsinore that Gertrude has become: a woman whose presence is little more than a convenience for men. Her sanity keeps her on the periphery of the play's action; moderately useful to Polonius and the King, but otherwise, a 'green girl'. In a scene of 136 lines, in which her relationship with Hamlet is the principal theme, Ophelia speaks a mere twenty lines (I.iii). She is passive, obedient, ordered about and kept in ignorance of the reasons why. Laertes advises her to consider Hamlet's station: 'Fear it, Ophelia, fear it my dear sister and keep you in the rear of your affections ... ' (I.iii.33-4). Polonius bullies her: 'Do not believe his vows ... Look to't I charge you, come your ways' (I.iii. 135). Hamlet dismisses her probably to a nunnery and possibly to a brothel. Ophelia thus has to cope with the task of resolving the contradictions that such conflicting loyalties produce. In these circumstances, madness become her asylum, her space between the 'incensed points of mighty opposites' (V.ii.61).

Even in madness, Ophelia is patronised as the 'pretty lady' and 'poor Ophelia', 'divided from herself and her fair judgement, without which we are pictures or mere beasts' (IV.v.85-6). But Ophelia's 'self and 'fair judgement' were never more than a construction of femininity, *qua* submissive daughter and chaste lover, imposed upon her by the men in the play, Polonius, Laertes, Hamlet and now Claudius. In contrast, madness brings Ophelia briefly but spectacularly to life as a lover and folk-tale heroine. She has started to sing. Insane, Ophelia breaks from the subjection of a vehemently patriarchal society and makes public display, in her verses, of the body she has been taught to suppress. Her speech, once brief and submissive, is now dangerously lyrical, figurative and promiscuous. No longer closeted and sewing, passively obedient to the men who owned and subjected her, she roams the palace grounds. Ophelia is followed because no one dare touch her. She will not be taken by the hand. But this vision of a femininity other than that constructed by men for women could not, in the early seventeenth century, last for long. Ophelia's madness already announces her death: 'O heavens, is't possible a young maid's wits should be as mortal as an old man's life?' (IV.v. 159-60). Dressed in all the colour of flowers, Ophelia's body reads as 'a document in madness', inscribed with an insanity soon to be erased altogether. The dominant symbol of the closing scenes is now the Fool's skull, the tragic equivalent of the ass's head in the comedies, an emblem of madness and change, and shortly after she has bid the Court goodnight, Ophelia is tempted towards the flood (to use Horatio's words), slips under 'so many fathoms ... and hears it roar beneath'.

The cause of Ophelia's madness is only ambiguously answered by the play. Polonius, no doubt, would have a theory about it (cf. II.ii. 145-9), but Claudius holds the more pragmatic view. It stems, as he sees it, from 'The poison of deep grief: it springs all from her father's death' (IV.v.75-6). Thus he makes Hamlet responsible. But if Claudius is evasive about his own culpability, so equally is Hamlet:

What I have done ...
... I here proclaim was madness.
Was't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes? Never Hamlet.
If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
And when he's not himself does wrong
Laertes,
Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.
Who does it then? His madness. If't be so,
Hamlet is of the faction that is wrong'd;
His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.
(V.ii.226-35)

The division of subjectivity that both Hamlet and Ophelia experience ('If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away' / 'Poor Ophelia, divided from herself and her fair judgement') is an effect of the political and social failure that

extends throughout the play. Hamlet declares himself to be of the faction that is wronged. As he sees it, he is more acted upon than acting. So it is hardly surprising that not even he can make sense of his actions, his 'madness'. Unable to contain all the conflicting duties of sonship, revenge, and prospective sovereignty, Hamlet registers his confusion by making madness, and no longer Claudius, his enemy. The question of individual (as opposed to corporate or social) culpability is raised and dropped in the same moment. The play at once glimpses the Cartesian moment of essential identity and loses sight of it. The responsibility for Ophelia's madness is shifted back on to the madness of political turmoil and social unrest. At the same time, every subject, action and resistance is implicated in the failure of reason and social order dramatised in the play as an inexorable movement towards death and a certainty at last. ...

Notes

⁷ All references are to William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982).

⁸ Cited in *Shakespeare in Europe*, ed. O. Le Winter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 76.

⁹ Harry Levin, *The Question of Hamlet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959). Maynard Mack, 'The World of Hamlet' in Leonard F. Dean ed., *Shakespeare: Modern Essays in Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, rvd. edn. 1967), pp. 242-62.

¹⁰ Maynard Mack in Dean, op. cit., p. 245.

¹¹ Foucault, op. cit., p. 287.

Alison Findlay (essay date 1994)

SOURCE: "Hamlet: A Document in Madness," in *New Essays on Hamlet*, edited by Mark Thornton Burnett and John Manning, 1994, pp. 189-203.

[In the following essay, Findlay focuses on the "relationship between words, madness and the desire for order" in *Hamlet*, especially in terms of the discourses of gender and language.]

Some four hundred pages into *The Anatomy of Melancholy* Robert Burton comes close to admitting that his task is impossible:

Who can sufficiently speak of these symptoms, or prescribe rules to comprehend them? ... if you will describe melancholy, describe a phantastical conceit, a corrupt imagination, vain thoughts and different, which who can do? The four-and-twenty letters make no more variety of words in divers languages than melancholy conceits produce diversity of symptoms in several persons. They are irregular, obscure, various, so infinite, Proteus himself is not so diverse ...!

This passage reveals the tensions that exist between language and mental disorder, between documents and madness. Words are inadequate to anatomize Burton's subject but remain the means of control and communication. One must 'speak of these symptoms' in order to 'prescribe rules to comprehend them', difficult though the task may be. Burton's own description of madness significantly uses the metaphor of language and problematizes the relationship between the two even further. He compares 'melancholy conceits' to 'the four-and-twenty letters', says the symptoms of mental illness are a 'variety of words' and describes the people who exhibit them as 'divers languages'. The extended metaphor suggests that identity and madness are verbally constructed. In reverse, it also implies that letters, words and languages are themselves mad. Like the

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symptoms of melancholy, they carry a plurality of meanings, an excess of interpretations. Although Burton begins the extract by stressing the importance of speech as a means of rational control, he ends it by implicitly eliminating the difference between language and the insanity it seems to subjugate.

The relationship between words, madness and the desire for order is the subject of my investigation into *Hamlet*. My aim is not to provide an analysis of the causes and symptoms of Hamlet's or Ophelia's madness *per se*. By comparing their roles, my essay will examine how gender dictates access to a language with which to cope with mental breakdown. It will consider how madness produces and is produced by a fragmentation of discourse.

Before proceeding to these detailed examinations, it is important to look at the court, the social context in which Hamlet and Ophelia speak. The world of Elsinore is particularly vulnerable to madness. Renaissance physicians, preachers and astrologers commonly cited fear and grief as the principle causes of mental disorder.² These emotions abound in Denmark, imperilling the sanity of society at large. Excessive mourning was regarded as particularly dangerous, so the moderate show of grief evident in I. ii. is a safeguard against madness as well as a disguise for crime. Gertrude's composure in response to her husband's death is not a type of insanity, a loss of the 'discourse of reason' (I. ii. 150), but a protection of it. For Claudius to consider his crime too deeply would also be dangerous. He ironically speaks the truth when he claims 'That we with wisest sorrow think on him / Together with remembrance of ourselves' (I. ii. 6). Hints in the text suggest that a preoccupation with the murder, combined with an increasing fear of Hamlet, threatens Claudius's sanity as the play continues (III. ii. 295-9 and IV. iii. 69-70).

Outside the immediate Hamlet family circle, the prison of Denmark is the asylum for a 'distracted multitude' of inhabitants (IV. iii. 4). At the opening of the play Francisco admits he is 'sick at heart' (I. i. 9), and the sighting of the ghost by Bernardo and Marcellus is regarded by Horatio as a symptom of mental instability (I. i. 26-8). The audience, who also see the ghost each time it appears, are included in the community of disordered consciousnesses. This is made explicit in V. i. when the Grave-digger refers to Hamlet's exile:

HAMLET: Why was he sent into England?
GRAVE-DIGGER: Why, because a was mad. A
shall recover his wits there. Or if a do not,
'tis no great matter there.
HAMLET: Why?
GRAVE-DIGGER: 'Twill not be seen in him there.
There the men are as mad as he.
(V. i. 145-50)

The 'distracted globe' (I. v. 97) extends beyond Denmark to embrace the spectators.³ Amongst the English audience, Hamlet's lunacy will not be noticed; he speaks the same language.

The death of King Hamlet puts the language of Elsinore out of joint as well as disrupting its emotional order. The characters struggle to rationalize their experiences in a court where discourse has broken down into a 'rhapsody of words' (III. iv. 48). At the top of the power structure a fissure is created: 'The King is a thing ... Of nothing' (IV. ii. 27-9). King Hamlet is a spirit without a form, a figment of madness or 'fantasy', whereas King Claudius is an empty letter of majesty. Neither has full presence in the play. As a result, the action can no longer be suited to the word nor the word to the action. With the death of King Hamlet, the network of close knit meanings and signs unravels so that all the characters become prisoners of an unstable and plural language. Claudius comments on the gap between 'my deed' and 'my most painted word' (III. i. 53). Words are no longer fixed by any palpable intention; the 'very soul' has been plucked out of the 'body of contraction' (III. iv. 46-7), and it is impossible to identify that which 'passes show' (I. ii. 85). In *Madness and Civilization* Foucault explains how these circumstances where 'Meaning is no longer read in an immediate perception'

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make a signifying system (like that of language) very accommodating to madness. Once the sign is detached from any authentic intention, it becomes 'burdened with supplementary meanings, and forced to express them. And dreams, madness, the unreasonable can also slip into this excess of meaning.'⁴

Elsinore constructs a courtly discourse characterized by verbosity and an anxiety to fix meaning by definition. In II. ii., Polonius's speeches provide an example. He introduces the subject of Hamlet's madness with the words:

My liege and madam, to expostulate
What majesty should be, what duty is,
Why day is day, night night, and time is time,
Were nothing but to waste night, day, and
time.

I will be brief. Your noble son is mad.
Mad call I it, for to define true madness,
What is't but to be nothing else but mad?

(II. ii. 86-94)

Polonius's oratory does, as Dr Johnson claimed, make mockery 'of prefaces that made no introduction, and of method that embarrassed rather than explained',⁵ but it also displays an infinite 'deferral' of meaning. The opening lines are not about the nature of majesty, duty, day, night or time, but the failure of language as representation. Polonius may be tedious, but he is not stupid. He shows an awareness of his own mode of expression as a system of self-referring 'limbs and outward flourishes' (II. ii. 91). Like Burton, he recognizes a close relationship between language and madness in spite of their apparent opposition as embodiments of reason and non-reason. To define madness is to 'be nothing else but mad'. His insight into the nature of words makes him appear as foolish as Hamlet. It displays 'an absurd agitation in society, the mobility of reason'.⁶

It is in this disturbed environment that Hamlet and Ophelia are threatened with mental breakdowns, rendering their need to define their experiences and redefine themselves particularly acute. The extent to which they are able to 'put [their] discourse into some frame' (III. ii. 300) is an essential element in the contrasting representations of madness that Shakespeare offers in these two characters.

In the preface to *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Burton explains that he wrote the book not simply for the elucidation of others but as a cure for his own mental illness:

I might be of Thucydides' opinion, "To know a thing and not to express it, is all one as if he knew it not." When I first took this task in hand, *et quod ait ille, impellente genio negotium suscepi* [and, as he saith I undertook the work from some inner impulse], this I aimed at, *vel ut lenirem animum scribendo*, [or] to ease my mind by writing; for I had *gravidum cor, foedum caput*, a kind of imposthume in my head, which I was very desirous to be unladen of, and could imagine no fitter evacuation than this ... I was not a little offended with this malady ... I would ... make an antidote out of that which was the prime cause of my disease.⁷

Burton equates expression and knowledge, suggesting that the traumatized individual can only become self-aware through the external articulation of a malady.

Working with language allows him to step outside his condition: 'to ease my mind by writing'. He uses his complaint as the raw material for his book, and recording ideas about melancholy becomes a treatment and cure.

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After what must be Hamlet's most disturbing experience to date—the ghost's revelation of the murder—the prince resorts to the same selfcure in order to control his 'distracted globe'. The discourse of his mind has been interrupted by a voice which speaks only to him and which introduces a range of experience that could easily put him from 'th' understanding of himself (II. ii. 9), but writing and speech provide the means to couple 'all you host of heaven', earth and hell (I. v. 92-3). To avoid a diagnosis of schizophrenia (where the subject experiences voices not his own inserted into the mind from outside), Hamlet responds to the ghost's news with a determination to document his experience and the ghost's voice:

from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures
past
That youth and observation copied there,
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain ...
(I. v. 98-103)

This mental record does not prove sufficient; thoughts of Gertrude and Claudius disorder the regular rhythm of Hamlet's speech and distract his mind again (I. v. 105-6). To control this outburst of emotion, Hamlet turns to external documentation—writing in his tables. Once Claudius has been 'writ down' a villain after the ghost's report, Hamlet can return to his own 'word' (I. v. 110). Further details in the play show how Hamlet uses his control over the written word to empower himself in emotionally disturbing situations. He writes to Ophelia, to Horatio and to Claudius, and rewrites his destiny by substituting his own letter to the English monarch. He adapts *The Murder of Gonzago* as *The Mousetrap* in order to 'catch the conscience of the King' (II. ii. 601), and even when he is reading a book he imposes his own meaning or 'matter' onto the words to mock Polonius (II. ii. 191-204).

The importance of rewording to restore mental equilibrium is clear after Hamlet's second encounter with the ghost in III. iv. His initial responses to it convince Gertrude of his madness since his eyes look wild, his hair stands on end and his speech of spontaneous expression seems to be a discourse with the 'incorporal air' (III. iv. 118). As on the previous occasion, once the ghost has departed, Hamlet is ready to reencode his experience in a language which will make it appear reasonable. He tells Gertrude

It is not madness
That I have utter'd. Bring me to the test,
And I the matter will reword, which madness
Would gambol from.
(III. iv. 143-6)

Hamlet's ability to transpose experience from one language to another is shown at several points. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern say he is at once 'distracted' but using a 'crafty madness' to remain impenetrable (III. i. 5, 8). He tells them himself that he is 'but mad north-northwest' and that he can distinguish his sane speech from that of lunacy, knowing the difference between a hawk and a handsaw (II. ii. 374-5). Polonius and Claudius also recognize method in Hamlet's madness which, to Claudius, indicates a degree of self-awareness on Hamlet's part (III. i. 165-7). Hamlet's double voice bears similarities to contemporary cases of mental illness like that of Richard Napier's patient who would use 'idle talk' and cry out on devils in his distraction but could talk 'wisely until the fit cometh on him'. Popular accounts of melancholy pointed out that patients were frequently able to scrutinize their own abnormal behaviour from outside, whereas true lunatics could not.⁸ Hamlet follows this pattern, describing himself as analyst and patient when he apologizes to Laertes at the end of the play:

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What I have done
That might your nature, honour, and exception
Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.
Was't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes? Never Hamlet.
If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
And when he's not himself does wrong
Laertes,
Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.
Who does it then? His madness. If t be so,
Hamlet is of the faction that is wrong'd;
His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.
(V. ii. 226-35)

Hamlet refers to his madness as a 'sore distraction' with which he is currently afflicted (V. ii. 225), so his self-analysis is not a retrospective one except in the narrowest sense. He speaks both inside and outside his malady, as he had done earlier, making use of syntactic modification to explain and control his mental state.

As the play shows, Hamlet does not always talk so wisely. In comparison to the measured blank verse of the lines above, much of his speech is in a style which makes little immediate sense to the characters around him. Although Hamlet depends on 'Words, words, words' (II. ii. 192) to stay sane, the disturbing encounter with the ghost has made him inescapably aware of their plurality and artifice. This forces Hamlet to fall into a speech which will expose *différance*. He tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that he cannot make 'a wholesome answer'; his wit is diseased (III. ii. 313).

His 'distracted' speeches suggest that it is language as much as female sexuality, neglected love, or grief that has made him mad. His conversation with Ophelia about beauty, honesty and discourse (III. i. 103-15) links his emotional concerns and his awareness that speech is common to a multitude of meanings rather than honest to one. Hamlet demonstrates this blatantly in his use of puns. His 'antic disposition' (I. v. 180) uses a style which Irigaray would term 'feminine' since it is a direct contradiction of the authoritative power of language used to maintain patriarchy. His 'mad' speeches exploit a lack of unity in the subject and 'undo the unique meaning, the proper meaning of words'.⁹

Hamlet's distrust of language is dangerous since it threatens to invalidate the very means which he uses to avoid breakdown. It is like the patient realizing that his cure is a poison to drive him further into madness. Discussing Plato's use of the ambiguous word *pharmakon* to describe writing, Derrida points out that *pharmakon* means both 'poison' and 'remedy'.¹⁰ Hamlet is in the position of seeing both sides of this paradox at once. He recognizes the need for language to construct sanity but cannot escape his awareness of its essential folly. What allows him to reconcile the two and avoid complete mental collapse is his use of theatre. It is not surprising that he welcomes the players so warmly. By virtue of their status as performers they are able to provide a register of speech which allows Hamlet to tell the truth of his father's murder while demonstrating the artificial nature of all utterances. The players are able to 'Suit the action to the word, the word to the action' (III. ii. 17-18) within a signifying system, a play whose social construction is obvious. J. L. Austin's theory of speech acts would discredit their performative utterances as 'parasitical' by pointing out that their fictional nature would abrogate the speaker's responsibility and deny them the required 'serious' intention.¹¹ But behind this bait of falsehood lurks a series of truths. Firstly, the 'parasitic' declarations present truths in that their false nature merely reflects the lies which dominate the court world and thus shows, as Hamlet wished, 'the very age and body of the time his form and pressure' (III. ii. 23-4). In addition, their self-conscious artifice exposes all utterances as repetitions of an already-written script, however truthful they may be. By demonstrating the dramatic truth of each particular fictional moment, the actors anticipate Derrida's response to Austin, showing that all speech acts are performative (dependent on the context in which they are produced and received) and that all are performances, even though they may be authentic.¹²

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Theatre therefore provides Hamlet with the ideal metaphor to expose the rhetoric of power which operates in Elsinore. He questions Polonius about his role as an actor (III. ii. 97-105) and welcomes Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, using imagery of performance (II. ii. 366- 71). By contrasting the hypocritical welcome he gives them with that he will give the players, he suggests the equally rhetorical nature of all such 'fashion and ceremony' (II. ii. 368), whether it be genuine or not. His quaint revenge on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is to create new roles for them in England in a play of his own devising (V. ii. 30-2).¹³

The combination of truth and illusion in theatre is what Foucault identifies as a 'tamed' madness: 'theatre develops its truth, which is illusion. Which is, in the strict sense, madness.' Since this madness carries its illusion to the point of truth, it provides the ideal expression of Hamlet's dilemma. After the success of his own performances, he asks 'Would not this ... get me a fellowship in a cry of players?' (III. ii. 269-72). The scene highlights important ideas about Hamlet's role as a madman. He adopts his 'antic disposition' quite openly, telling Horatio, 'I must be idle' (III. ii. 90). Whether Hamlet is clinically mad or mad in craft is finally irrelevant since there is no difference between illusion and truth once the play of language is exposed as a 'crafty madness' (III. i. 8). For this reason, *Hamlet* contradicts Foucault's view of madness in Shakespeare's work as 'beyond appeal', where 'Nothing ever restores it either to truth or to reason'. In the case of Hamlet, it occupies a median rather than an extreme place, displaying both the breakdown of reason and the control of insanity in language. Hamlet's 'tamed' madness is not considered as a 'tragic reality' but only in 'the irony of its illusions'. It already exhibits elements of self-reflection which provide a prototype for classical madness:

Tamed, madness preserves all the appearances of its reign. It now takes part in the measures of reason and in the labour of truth. It plays on the surface of things and in the glitter of daylight, over all the workings of appearances, over the ambiguity of reality and illusion, over all that indeterminate web, ever rewoven and broken, which both unites and separates truth and appearance.

The balancing act which Hamlet is able to maintain throughout the play is dependent on his ability to use a verbal and theatrical metalanguage with which to construct and contain the experience of insanity. This is a language which Ophelia does not have. Her experience seems much closer to Foucault's definition of madness in Shakespeare's work. He cites her as one example of insanity which 'leads only to laceration and thence to death'.¹⁴ It is not that Ophelia's grief for her lost love or her father's death is more intense than Hamlet's. She suffers differently because of her gender. To examine this further, I want to use Irigaray's thesis that in madness 'there are specific linguistic disturbances according to sexual differences'. Irigaray argues that, in cases of schizophrenia, gender appears to dictate a patient's access to a language with which to articulate trauma, that a woman in a state of madness does not have the same means for elaborating a delirium as a man. Since female patients cannot transpose their suffering into language, they suffer schizophrenia as corporeal pain: 'instead of language being the medium of expression of the delirium the latter remains in the body itself'.¹⁵ This theory is echoed very closely in Burton's discussion of 'Women's Melancholy' (indeed, the book itself shows a marked contrast in the documentation of male and female experience, since 'Women's Melancholy' occupies only five out of a total of over a thousand pages of analysis). Burton remarks:

Many of them cannot tell how to express themselves in words, or how it holds them, what ails them; you cannot understand them, or well tell what to make of their sayings; so far gone sometimes, so stupefied and distracted, they think themselves bewitched, they are in despair, *aptæad fletum, desperationem* [prone to weeping, despondency]; *dolores mammis et hypochondriis*, Mercatus therefore adds, now their breasts, now their hypochondries, belly and sides, then their heart and head aches; now heat, then wind, now this, now that offends, they are weary of all; and yet will not, cannot again tell how, where, or what offends them, though they be in great pain ...¹⁶

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The play shows clearly that Ophelia does not have the speech and writing which Hamlet uses to cope with mental crisis. While Hamlet is 'as good as a chorus' (III. ii. 240), Ophelia has only a tenth of the number of lines he speaks. She does not appear able to discuss her distraction in a rational way and turns her suffering inwards on her body. The gentleman who reports her madness to Gertrude says that Ophelia 'hems, and beats her heart' (IV. v. 5) and implies that she communicates through physical gestures (IV. v. 11). He tells Gertrude, 'Her speech is nothing' (IV. v. 7). Such details appear to endorse the links between silence and hysteria proposed by Cixous, who writes:

Silence: silence is the mark of hysteria. The great hysterics have lost speech ... their tongues are cut off and what talks instead isn't heard because it's the body that talks and man doesn't hear the body.¹⁷

Using this idea to read the play produces a depressing picture of Ophelia as 'Deprived of thought, sexuality, language'; and concludes that her role becomes 'the Story of O—the zero, the empty circle or mystery of feminine difference', as Showalter remarks.¹⁸ Attempts such as Ranjini Philip's to read Ophelia's suicide in positive terms as 'an existential act of partial selfawareness' in order to tell her story as 'something' seem pessimistic.¹⁹ In the hope of finding a more positive image, I want to turn to the work of one of Shakespeare's female contemporaries. Far from remaining silent, this woman produced a written account to explain her mental breakdown to physicians, fellow sufferers and, more importantly, to herself. A brief examination of Dionys Fitzherbert's manuscript, written in 1608, provides the opportunity to see Ophelia's ravings in a new light.²

Dionys's text, *An Anatomie for the Poore in Spirrit* contradicts those who would link female hysteria and silence. Her aim is to differentiate her breakdown from other types of madness by analyzing it as a spiritual test, a trial by God. In a preface, she openly challenges those who would label her case as madness and outlines in detail the differences between melancholy, as defined by contemporary medical theory, and her own symptoms. She points out that 'the like passages doth more then distinguish their case from all others in the judgement of any well seeing eyes'.

Dionys frequently makes reference to reading, writing and speech, suggesting their importance as means of rationalizing her experience. She points out that at the height of her fits and torments she was 'for the most part speechles if not altogether' and suggests the physical dangers caused by this loss:

they thought yt almost impossible many tymes for me to live an hower, but that my hart must needs splitt and rent in peeces with the unutterable groanes and sighes that were continually powred forth, being neither able by teares nor speech to expresse the unspeakeable dolour and torment of my sowle.

When she first recovers speech, her voice is split between declarations of atheism and expressions of religious faith, a confusion which she calls 'the discourse of the mynd'.²¹ She is later able to converse more lucidly and uses reading and writing to recover and prove her sanity. She stresses the importance of allowing a patient access to literature and the means to write and tells how upsetting it was to have her books removed so that she could no longer continue her study of Scripture. When she was recuperating in Oxford, her greatest affliction was occasioned by visiting the libraries:

the multitude of books which I saw in which I had taken such singuler delight, now strooke me to the hart to thinke I could have noe comfort of them.

Her recovery is helped by the gift of a book, *The Comforter*, and by the writing of a religious mediation. Her restoration to complete mental health is seen in the account itself. *An Anatomie for the Poore in Spirrit* is the means by which Dionys is able to explain what has happened to her and it stands as testimony to her sanity. In

describing her case, she often confuses the identities of patient and analyst, the afflicted Dionys of the past and the recovered and diagnostic Dionys who writes, but for the most part the text reads lucidly. The preface in which she challenges those who would label her as mad is logically organized and forcefully argued. She points out how strong opposition can sometimes allow patients to 'find out the truth even in themselves, as my example ... doth evidently shew'.

In *Hamlet* we cannot read Ophelia's *Anatomie* of her condition, nor does the text indicate that she ever has the opportunity to write one. Without the language with which to discuss her case, she remains largely incoherent. This is not due to a failure in language itself or to an essential silence on the part of women hysterics. Whatever the limitations of words in expressing female experience, Dionys's case proves that they remain a valuable tool for the transposition of internal distress. More important than an inadequacy of language is Ophelia's very limited access to any verbal communication with which to unpack her heart. Polonius's advice to Laertes, 'Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice' (I. iii. 68), is taken to an extreme with Ophelia who is forbidden to 'give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet' (I. iii. 134) or with anyone else except under supervision. She becomes a private document where her father and brother imprint their words and control the articulation of ideas by means of lock and key. In the sense that Ophelia's mind is forced to accommodate voices inserted from outside, she is a schizophrenic from the beginning of the play. These imposed voices conflict with a repository of emotional and critical perceptions which she is rarely able to express. Only occasionally does Shakespeare give hints about the contents of Ophelia's thought book, as in her response to Laertes's advice which implicitly mocks the double standard (I. iii. 46-51). When she tells Hamlet, 'I think nothing, my lord' (III. ii. 116), she refers not to a lack of thought but to the censure placed on the expression of her own emotions and opinions. This lady cannot 'say her mind freely' (II. ii. 323-4) at moments of crisis. In her interview with Hamlet in III. i., she speaks what she ought to say rather than what she feels. Having suffered a torrent of abuse, she describes herself as the viewer/analyst of his mental collapse rather than giving full voice to her own feelings (III. i. 152-63). Since Polonius silences her completely with the words, 'You need not tell us what Lord Hamlet said, / We heard it all' (III. i. 181-2), she has no opportunity to communicate her distress.

The death of Polonius confronts Ophelia with an unprecedented access to language which is both liberating and frightening. It unlocks her tongue from the repetition of patriarchal meanings and allows her to speak as author of herself, a situation for which she and the court are totally unprepared. Even though Polonius's censure is removed, other characters try to silence or ignore her. Gertrude says, 'I will not speak with her' (IV. v. 1), and she and Claudius constantly interrupt Ophelia. Laertes attempts to impose meaning on her language, reducing her from an active speaker to an object of interpretation, a document in madness.

She is first of all a text of filial love, whose wits are bound to her beloved father in the grave (IV. v. 159-63). She then becomes a petition for revenge (IV. v. 167), and finally, an aesthetically pleasing translation (IV. v. 185-6). Unlike Dionys Fitzherbert, Ophelia is only able to express the confused 'discourse of the mynd' which is then documented by others with explanatory footnotes. The gentleman who reports her madness to Gertrude points out that Ophelia's 'unshaped' speech

doth move
The hearers to collection. They aim at it,
And botch the words up fit to their own
thoughts,
Which, as her winks and nods and gestures
yield them,
Indeed would make one think there might be
thought,
Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily.
(IV. v. 8-13)

Even in this role as a 'document in madness', Ophelia finds a way of speaking. The gentleman may say 'Her speech is nothing' (IV. v. 7), but David Leverenz is wrong to conclude that 'even in her madness she has no voice of her own'.²² Ophelia's songs and quotations give her a very definite register, one which demonstrates the 'citationality' of all speech. Her lines are confused but they have 'matter' (IV. v. 172). As Bridget Gellert Lyons points out, 'While her language is more oblique, pictorial, and symbolic, she expresses the discords that Hamlet registers more consciously and with greater control in his language and behaviour.'²³ Although Ophelia cannot analyze her trauma, her language of madness is appropriate to the expression of such ideas.

By distributing flowers in IV. v., Ophelia draws attention to the breakdown of unique meaning in Elsinore, revealing the ambiguous signification of Flora and flowers as symbols of both innocence and sexual prostitution.²⁴ She parodies Elsinore's attempts to structure its environment verbally in her own definitions of the flowers and their meanings. These are undercut when she points out the ambiguity of rue: 'You must wear your rue with a difference' (IV. v. 180-1). The plant may signify repentance, but the word 'grace' means nothing if applied to Claudius. Ophelia's songs, which give clues to the causes of her distraction, are in the same mode as Hamlet's adaptation, *The Mousetrap*, and his use of ballad (III. ii. 265-78); but, unlike Hamlet, she will not act as a chorus. She tells her listeners, 'pray you mark' (IV. v. 28 and 35), obliging them to make a variety of subjective interpretations. Claudius's attempt to impose a single masculine meaning by saying the song is a 'Conceit upon her father' (IV. v. 45) is rejected out of hand by Ophelia. She tells him, 'Pray let's have no words of this, but when they ask you what it means, say you this' (IV. v. 46-7), and then sings another ballad which, rather than explaining the song, illustrates the 'deferral' of meaning. One ballad can only be interpreted in terms of its difference from another, and all are blatant repetitions of the 'already written'. It is therefore impossible to 'make an end' (IV. v. 57) in terms of meaning. Ophelia's determination to finish her song reveals a preoccupation with the performative nature of speech. She has just as much cause as Hamlet to mistrust vows, and the last verse about oaths (IV. v. 58-66) deconstructs the seriousness of all such declarations by demonstrating the equally rhetorical nature of false and true vows.

While Ophelia's thoughts lack the self-control and clear articulation found in many of Hamlet's speeches, the scenes do show that she is struggling to convey important ideas. Because of the rigid prohibition on her speech earlier in the play, it is not surprising that she 'speaks things in doubt / That carry but half sense' (IV. v. 6-7). In this she is surely typical of her period. Dionys Fitzherbert's text gives inspiring evidence of a woman's success in challenging the conventional view of the silent hysteric; the case of Margaret Muschamp, some forty years later, gives a more accurate impression of the difficulties encountered by such women. Margaret fell into fits and heard 'voices' between the years 1645-7. Believing she was bewitched, she tried to communicate the names of her tormenters by writing, after she had come out of the extremity of her fit. The account shows the degree of corporeal pain suffered by the female schizophrenic:

After a while she would make her hand goe on her brest, as if she would write, with her eyes fixt on her object; they layd paper on her brest, and put a pen with inke in her hand, and she not moving her eyes, writ, Jo. Hu. Do. Swo. have beene the death of one deare friend, consume another, and torment mee; whilst she was writing these words, she was blowne up ready to burst, shrinking with her head, as if she feared blowes; then would she be drawne, as in convulsion fits, till she got that writing from them that had it, and either burne it in the fire, or chew it in her mouth, till it could not be discerned ...²⁵

Like Ophelia's lines, Margaret's accusations against John Hutton and Dorothy Swinnow are a spontaneous outpouring, an incompletely articulated discourse of madness. The impulse to write is combined with an equally strong negative response to the document she produces. Unlike Burton or Hamlet whose transcriptions ease the mind, Margaret's experience of writing provokes fear which is expressed in bodily terms as painful convulsions and swellings. Far from helping her condition, the literal expression of her ideas causes guilt and stress. The only way of relieving her physical torment is to destroy the illegitimate product of her labours: to burn it or to eat it, thus reincorporating her words. Even if the paper was taken from her and hidden, Margaret

Muschamp would continue to suffer, until she had sought out the document and destroyed it. When 'none could discern one word she had wrote, then immediately she would have ease'.²⁶

The discussion of writing here has important implications outside the immediate context of the extract, since the account was written by Margaret's mother, Mary Moore. Does Margaret's experience provide Mary with a meta-narrative to discuss her own problems in producing the text in a period where female chastity was equated with silence? To transgress and articulate,—let alone write, was to be regarded as deviant, abnormal. To write a document on madness was to become a document in madness to a certain extent. The experience of Ophelia, trying to find a voice in the play, can therefore be read as a model for the difficulties facing Renaissance women writers; not only those like Dionys Fitzherbert and Mary Moore who were documenting madness, but also those who were endeavouring to express their ideas in poetry, prose and plays. Like Ophelia, they may 'speak things in doubt' but they do not remain silent.

Finally, it is sobering to note that the experiences of these women find a further reflection in the work of female scholars trying to write themselves into the bibliographical history of the play. *Hamlet* has never been edited by a woman.²⁷ The text is notoriously challenging since the contradictions between the 'Good Quarto', the 'Bad Quarto' and the Folio make *Hamlet* itself a 'document in madness'. At I. iii. 21, the creation of 'sanity' has been, to date, the privilege of Theobald and subsequent male editors, from the starting points of 'safty' in the 'Good Quarto', the third Quarto's 'safety', and the Folio's 'sanctity'. The opportunity to rationalize the different voices of this schizophrenic text has been limited to men, the Hamlets rather than the Ophelias of the academic world, thus reproducing the gender imbalance in the play.

Notes

¹ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Holbrook Jackson, 3 vols (London: Everyman, 1968), I, 408.

² Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 72-3.

³ Andrew Gurr investigates in detail the double metaphor of Hamlet's 'distracted globe' in *Hamlet and the Distracted Globe* (Edinburgh: Sussex University Press, 1978).

⁴ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, tr. Richard Howard (London: Tavistock Publications, 1967), p. 19.

⁵ Cited in Jenkins's edition of *Hamlet*, p. 241.

⁶ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, p. 37.

⁷ Burton, *Anatomy*, I, 21.

⁸ MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, pp. 146-7.

⁹ Luce Irigaray, 'Women's Exile' in Deborah Cameron, ed., *The Feminist Critique of Language* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 83-4.

¹⁰ Discussed by Barbara Johnson, 'Writing' in Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, eds, *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 46.

¹¹ *How To Do Things With Words* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 21-2.

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¹² In *How To Do Things With Words*, Austin asserts a difference between utterances of a constative nature (answerable to a requirement of truth in their relation to the world) and those of a performative nature (dependent on the context in which they are produced and received). He further distinguishes between 'serious' and 'non-serious' performative utterances: for the utterance to be 'serious', its speaker must take responsibility for what s/he says to guarantee the meaning of the performative in its context. In 'Signature, Event, Context' in *Margins of Philosophy*, tr. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), Derrida expands Austin's idea that actually all constative utterances are context-dependent and therefore performative; he further demonstrates that all speech acts are social constructions with an indirect rather than a direct relationship to the actions or objects they describe. This ultimately dissolves the boundaries between 'serious' and 'non-serious' utterances, revealing all speech acts to be produced in a more or less 'staged' setting.

¹³ For discussion of the complex nature of theatre as a form of metalanguage in the play, see Phyllis Gorfain, 'Towards a Theory of Play and the Carnavalesque in *Hamlet*', *Hamlet Studies*, 13 (1991), 25-49, and Robert Weimann, 'Mimesis in *Hamlet*' in Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman, eds, *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory* (New York and London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 275-91.

¹⁴ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, pp. 35, 31, 32, 36, 31.

¹⁵ Irigaray, 'Women's Exile' in Cameron, ed., *Feminist*, p. 94.

¹⁶ Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, I, 416.

¹⁷ Cited in Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1930* (London: Virago, 1987), pp. 160-1.

¹⁸ Elaine Showalter, 'Representing Ophelia: women, madness and the responsibilities of feminist criticism' in Parker and Hartman, eds, *Shakespeare*, p. 79.

¹⁹ Ranjini Philip, 'The Shattered Glass: The Story of (O)phelia', *Hamlet Studies*, 13 (1991), 75.

²⁰ am grateful to Kate Hodgkin for drawing my attention to Dionys Fitzherbert's writings. *An Anatomie for the Poore in Spirrit* exists in two versions; an original manuscript in Dionys's own hand (e Museo 169) and a fair copy in another hand with additional prefaces and letters attached (Bodley 154). Both are in the Bodleian library. Quotations are from the fair copy. My discussion of the texts is indebted to Kate Hodgkin's unpublished paper, 'Religion and madness in the writing of Dionys Fitzherbert', given at the conference, *Voicing Women: Gender / Sexuality / Writing 1500-1700*, at the University of Liverpool, 15 April 1992.

²¹ This phrase is taken from a letter by Dionys to M.H.

²² David Leverenz, 'The Woman in *Hamlet*: An Interpersonal View', *Signs*, 4 (1978), 301.

²³ Bridget Gellert Lyons, 'The Iconography of Ophelia', *English Literary History*, 44 (1977), 73.

²⁴ Lyons, 'Iconography', 63-4.

²⁵ Mary Moore, *Wonderfull news from the North* (London, 1650; Wing M2581), p. 5. In assigning the text to Mary Moore, I follow Maureen Bell, George Parfitt and Simon Shepherd, eds, *A Biographical Dictionary of English Women Writers 1580-1720* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990).

²⁶ Moore, *Wonderfull news*, p. 5.

²⁷ In the New Penguin Shakespeare (1980), Anne Barton wrote the introduction, but the text was edited by T.J.B. Spencer.

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