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“Though this be madness, yet there is method in’t.” Madness as Duality and Loss of Self in the
Plays of William Shakespeare

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Abstract

This essay is an analysis on the way in which William Shakespeare interacts with madness, as it was understood in Elizabethan England, in a select few of his works. In briefly examining the history of Madness in the sixteenth century as it was born from the idea of the four humors and the black bile driven sickness “melancholie,” it becomes evident that the English in Shakespeare’s time would have understood Madness, among other ways, as an internal imbalance and irrationality which lead to dual nature and eventually total loss of self. With this in mind, the essay shifts to an examination of three well known plays, *Richard III*, *King Lear*, and *Hamlet*, and the practice of falsity and play acting that appears in all. In light of the lesser-known sixteenth century understanding of madness as an internally-driven dissolution of character, the essay rereads certain characters in each text who participate in such duality as sufferers of this type of insanity, or (in some cases) mimicks of such sufferers. In this examination it is revealed how Shakespeare used this insanity as a tool for characterization and plot development. Further, Shakespeare’s use of this form of madness shows clearly the way in which the typical Elizabethan Englishman would have understood and related to the illness. In all, Shakespeare’s including of the emerging understanding of madness as duality shows not only his skill as a writer, but also the way in which he was in touch with both the society at the time and the human condition.

While an understood malady in the time of Shakespearean drama, madness was hardly synonymous with its modern connotations, although the Elizabethan sense of madness was in no way linked to a lack of interest. Indeed, the study of madness, insanity, and melancholy dominated in this period, as is evident from the subject's emergence in various kinds of prose, poetry, and drama. When considering the Renaissance, those concerned with the issue sought not only to define and better understand the characteristics and symptoms of the disease, but also to determine and identify reasonable causes. There were a number of causal explanations for madness that emerged throughout the early modern period. The malady was attributed to illness and fever, with proponents believing that these things affected the brain enough to bring on the disease, as least for a time. Astrological influence was another popular explanation, as people believed that the sway of certain planets, stars, and systems (at this time most popularly the moon) were what drove people to "lunacy." Niall McCrae in *The Moon and Madness* states, "Astrology was at the core of the prospectus at the fledgling universities of Western Europe, where budding physicians learned how planetary properties and motions predicted character, vigour and disease" (McCrae 54). Religion was also a continuing influence on the lives of most people, and thus madness was also attributed to certain of these aspects, with Plato stating in his text *Phaedrus* that "prophecy is a madness" and that the illness indicated a link to the Gods. Christians would later use evidence from the Old Testament to argue that some madness was a form of demonic possession. Despite all of these, the more significant explanations that appear are related to troubles in love or personal tragedy and grief in general. Death, for those living in the sixteenth century, was understood and responded to much differently than it typically is now. Factors such as the plague and high infant mortality rates hardened the Elizabethans to the idea of loss. That being said, when a death was out of the ordinary, such as the loss of a lover or an

untimely and unexpected demise, the shock of the tragedy was considered enough to send anyone into insanity. However, out of all of the explanations that developed throughout this period, the explanation of the four bodily humors, and internal imbalance, seems to be the most prevalent, endured for centuries, and was replaced only by the emergence of modern medicine.

When briefly considering the ways in which madness was conceptualized and understood in Elizabethan England, the plays of William Shakespeare show the playwright portraying the disease through a wide variety of symptoms, causes, and effects. His commentary is not limited to a select few ideas about the illness, but rather spans the entire evolution and multiple facets of the discussion. Many of his characters exist on this spectrum of madness and embody some of these popular theories. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, most of the main characters experience a level of delusion and insanity, which (excluding the influence of mythical creatures) is largely attributed to the effects of natural forces and astrological changes, showing the influence of ideas like "lunar madness." Many of the most popular representations of madness in Shakespeare's work, however, appear in tragedies where they are linked to the effects of love and grief. In *Othello*, the title character is driven to his insanity through his love for his wife Desdemona and his belief that she has been dishonest. Abuse by his daughters and the knowledge that he allowed it is what drives King Lear's descent into madness. Ophelia's madness is twofold: a rejection from her lover Hamlet and the death of her father Polonius at the hand of her lover. All these instances and more suggest that Shakespeare was well aware of these more "traditional" explanations for insanity that were in circulation at the time and was attempting to participate in this ongoing discussion.

However, while playing his part in the existing debates, Shakespeare was also depicting madness in his plays in a way that was unique to drama at the time and was innovative in the

exploration of insanity. Shakespeare creates in his characters a signature duality that comes to be used (alongside the other qualities described above) as a characteristic associated with madness in his works. In doing so he builds on the idea introduced through the four humors of the internal instability and conflict within an individual that leads to their madness. Beginning with an obvious double nature or play acting within a character, usually revealed to the audience through soliloquy, Shakespeare first builds characters who express duality in their ability to move between conflicting, and sometimes antithetical, personalities (usually one vindictive and cruel and one falsely nice) to achieve certain goals. However, as the play develops, the movement begins to happen involuntarily and the character loses control of a carefully crafted deception. The distinction between the two sides of the character gradually blurs, to the result of a loss of self and an overwhelming dominance of one personality (usually in these plays the power-hungry and malevolent one) over the other. Typically the character who is mad in this way will move from cunning and careful play acting, to a more reckless juggling of personalities, to a complete loss of control that is indistinguishable from madness. This gradual breakdown of duality not only creates realistic, complex characters, but also functions as a link between the audience and the truth. It allows a sort of structural irony that privileges the audience with what the other characters are missing. This aspect is especially important when considering the way a character may feign madness using duality. When looking at a few of William Shakespeare's best known plays, namely *Richard III* (1592), *King Lear* (1605), and *Hamlet* (1600), it becomes clear how the playwright worked with these themes and ideas on madness throughout his career, using them in the manner described above as tools for characterization and storytelling.

Understanding the way in which Shakespeare gets to this comprehension of madness and begins to work with these ideas in his plays requires a deeper understanding of the disease's

history, specifically as it relates to this dual nature that he explores. The study and treatment of madness was not widely expanded until the mid-seventeenth century and beyond, and this is where much of the research on the nature of mental illness begins. Even then much of the scholarship is centered on the treatment of the mad and the reforms that were enacted to control the more controversial methods. It is not until much later that actual conditions and their behaviors are named and classified (for example, “schizophrenia” is not recognized as a term until the twentieth century). That being said, while these conditions remain unnamed and underexplored for much of the early modern period, it is clear that there was at least some understanding of the malady of madness, its different forms, and its plausible different causes which date back to Ancient Greece.

The first notion of this arises in the idea of the “four humors.” Initiated by the philosopher and physician Hippocrates, later taken up by Aristotle, but popularized and refined by physician Galen, the concept is centered on the belief that four competing elements or “qualities” (heat, cold, humidity, and dryness) control four bodily substances (black bile, yellow bile, phlegm, and blood), which determine the behavior and physical well-being of an individual. In the text *On the Natural Faculties*, Galen speaks mainly of the physical, but also touches on the mental aspects that would be expanded upon as well. Four main personality types were created citing the attributes of specific humors and a person’s natural inclination towards one dominant humor, but soon added was the idea that an over-abundance or lack of specific humors would lead to problems within a person’s body and soul. Different imbalances in the humors were thus attributed to different maladies of all kinds. While the “science” behind these theories and the ideas that went into forming them underwent a shift with each new theorist who took up the idea and further complicated it, the driving force behind the concept of the humors remained, and

was, until its end in the nineteenth-century, the idea that illness of the body and mind is caused by some lack of proportion or imbalance within an individual. Specific dispositions are less important than the constant struggle that exists between them within any one individual and the imbalances that this creates. As mentioned above, this theory was used to expand physical illness, but was certainly not limited to it. From the beginning of its conception, the discussion of imbalance within the four humors attempted to explain insanity.

While the other three humors correlate quite clearly with aspects of modern biology, black bile does not. Some believe it was based on the appearance of deoxygenated blood that resulted from internal bleeding, but most agree that it was probably a philosophical construct. Whatever the reasoning behind it, black bile and the conditions that it caused were essential to this early scientific explanation of the body and mind. “Melancholia” is the term that refers to the result within an individual who suffers an abundance of the humor black bile. One could be naturally disposed towards this humor and would be characterized as “melancholic,” and would possess a certain expected set of features (dark hair, sallow skin, slower pulse) or behavioral traits (morbid, prone to aggravation), but it could also be more of a contracted imbalance. While some would argue that melancholics are the most likely to contract melancholia, the two are not synonymous, and a person of any humor could develop the malady. The subject of this issue was first taken up in the Renaissance by the doctor Timothie Bright in his *A Treatise of Melancholie*. Writing as a “phsicke” in 1556, Bright details some of the causes and manifestations of this early understanding of madness. In Chapter twenty two, Bright details “How melancholie altereth those actions which rise out of the brain.” He begins by stating that often melancholics are withdrawn and characterized by “dulnesse and conceit” and a “passive nature,” (129) while also being prone to sadness and fear. Besides this, however, he continues on to claim that they

are also often “wittie,” possess a certain “sharpnesse” and are often quickly drawn to passion. Essentially, Bright describes a person who is fairly unstable in emotion and behavior, and is in a way defined by the mind and almost trapped by it as well. Bright then continues his analysis, and deems them “doubtful” and “suspicious,” and explains that they are so because “those domesticall feares, or that internall obscuritie, causeth an opinion of danger in outwarde affaires, where there is no cause of doubt.” Outward expressions of these thoughts are described in a later chapter, in which Bright states that “the perturbations become distincte in kinde, and diverse in degree” (137). As is clear in Bright’s study of the malady, as it was understood in the sixteenth century, melancholie could be characterized by internality and oppressive thoughts that soon become obsessive and begin to cause changes in behavior. The extreme internality of their character leads them to unfounded ideas and irrational action.

A modern definition of melancholia is synonymous with depression, which aligns with some of the original belief that the main features of melancholia were “fear and sadness.” Further than this, however, the attributes of this illness of black bile were expanded outward from their original connotations, and melancholia soon became linked to “delirium.” This idea is expanded by Robert Burton, the celebrated writer who would further the study of melancholy and madness in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Although writing largely after Shakespeare’s time, his texts provide an extensive insight into how people thought about madness up to the point of his writing and is thus a valuable source when considering the illness as it would have been understood at the time of his plays. Burton would refine and expand on this very link between melancholy and delirium in his work “Democritus Junior,” stating, “Folly, Melancholy, Madnesse, are but one disease, *Dilerium is a common name to all*” (Gowland 14). The most prominent definition of delirium states, “A disordered state of the mental faculties

resulting from disturbance of the functions of the brain, and characterized by incoherent speech, hallucinations, restlessness, and frenzied or maniacal excitement” (OED). However, as Burton’s text suggests, and as Michel Foucault outlines in his book *Madness and Civilization*, the term “delirium” referred to a multitude of mental maladies but would ultimately be characterized by an obsession with one thought. As is clear, this aligns with Bright’s original musings. These differing perspectives on “melancholia” that can be found in Bright’s explanation and ones later, such as Foucault’s, were then reconciled into one idea: fear and sadness lead to isolation, which in turn allow for the growth of the delirious, obsessive thoughts. The two combine, in this argument, to create a spectrum and a cycle of behaviors that lead to what would have been considered insanity. Imbalances in the elements lead to imbalances in the bodily humors, which leads to imbalances in the emotions, and thus an imbalance in behavior and personality. Black bile gains dominance over the other three humors, leading to an increase in depressive symptoms and introversion, which then lead to a disposition towards delusions and false, obsessive thoughts which manifest into strange behavior. Returning again to Robert Burton, this idea is condensed and honed as he states, “who is not touched more or lesse in habit or disposition? If in disposition, *ill dispositions beget habits, if they persevere, saith Plutarch, habits either are, or turne to diseases*” (Gowland 14). Thus melancholia, as those in the early modern period would have understood it, becomes madness. When looking at the idea in this way, it is clear how the consideration of madness in the theory of the four humors aligns with other explanations in that they all relate to the same lack of balance. The disproportion does not exist within the same thing in each theory, ranging as we know from the stars to the bodily fluids, but they all share a commonality in suggesting that madness arises from a conflict between two or more opposing forces in which one emerges dominant.

The importance of the theory of the four humors goes beyond its explanation of the causes of madness in that it also extends into the manifestation and qualities of the maladies. The concept of melancholia is one of the first explanations of madness which suggests that the problem may be an internal one, its causes entirely separate from external influence. While other ideas about madness's causes persist, the notion that it is an internal problem dominates the Renaissance's conception of it. Returning to Michel Foucault's exploration of the illness during the period, he states "madness no longer lies in wait for mankind at the four corners of the earth; it insinuates itself within man, or rather it is a subtle rapport that man maintains with himself" (Foucault 26). For Foucault, this is a defining feature of the Renaissance when an obsession with madness dominated art and literature (as is apparent with the multiple examples found in the works of Shakespeare alone), and was characterized in part by the view of it as an internal conflict. He brings up later on that "the savage danger of madness is related to the danger of the passions," (Foucault 85) which again highlights the role that the individual plays in the malady, as opposed to his environment. For some, this holds religious overtones that were used in relation to madness, tracing it back to "original sin." Besides this, as was stated, it is another way in which Foucault describes the role that the individual and the mind itself plays in madness. According to Foucault, "self-attachment is the first sign of madness, but it is because man is attached to himself that he accepts error as truth, lies as reality, violence and ugliness as beauty and justice" (Foucault 26). Foucault also states that it is "the absolute privilege of Folly... to reign over whatever is bad in man" (Foucault 24) and relates madness to "fault and flaw" within man (Foucault 27). In this expansion on and description of the shifting attitudes of the early modern period towards madness, Foucault sets up an idea that will be central to a reading of madness in Shakespeare's plays, which is the idea of the inversion of personality and behavior.

One cannot go many pages in his analysis of the issue without encountering an explanation of madness that utilizes dualities to expand upon the point (as can be seen in the page 26 excerpt above) and the concept of being double and false is one that is equally as central to the idea of madness overall as it is to explaining the argument, especially when represented in Shakespeare's plays. Similar to what was discussed above within the different theories of madness and their focus on conflict, the internal conflict that comes to be accepted as madness at this time is all about a continual struggle between dual perspectives or personalities within. Later in the study of psychology, brought about by Sigmund Freud, this idea is complicated into the struggle between conscious and unconscious mind. In the mind of a madman, these two sides are in constant conflict, and the victory of one over the other (i.e. the unconscious over the conscious, the bad over the good, the reasonable over the irrational) is generally the point in which one is considered truly "mad," the point at which "nothing ever restores [madness] either to truth or to reason" (Foucault 31). Lillian Feder uses Freud's terminology to define the condition as it relates to her study *Madness in Literature* as "a state in which unconscious processes predominate over conscious ones to the extent that they control them and determine perceptions of and responses to experience" (Feder 5). By tracing the history of this malady from the beginning of its conceptions to the modern theories of the masters of its science, and keeping in sight the commonalities of internal conflict remain from the four humors Freud's exact theories, it is clear how well madness was really understood and how the perspective of duality or loss of self in Shakespeare's plays was and is an accurate representation of one level of madness. Keeping this perspective on the complex issue of in mind when considering such plays as will be discussed helps in contextualizing the internal conflict of certain characters and helps

explain how their behavior can be interpreted as Shakespeare's representation of a descent (or lack thereof) into madness.

Another significant aspect of madness to discuss, especially when looking at Foucault's interpretation of the matter, is the concept that madness reveals truth. This particular theme is a favorite of Shakespeare's, as it was with other artists and authors from Plato on, and is important to consider in respect to the history of representations of madness in Shakespeare's era, although not necessarily of the true history of madness itself. The idea began with Plato and his text *Phaedrus*. Truth, for the philosopher at this time, is divine, with what we see on earth being merely an imitation of this higher power. Thus, no one on earth but those with a connection to divinity have access to truth. Because of this, he states that prophets have the greatest link to truth, in that they hold the ability to communicate directly with the Gods and divinity. After making this argument, Plato then spends much of the text outlining the connection that exists between prophecy and what many consider madness, eventually stating that the two are often one in the same. Thus, he comes to the conclusion that madness, like prophecy, is a similar "divine gift," and gives its sufferer one such sacred link to the truth. While a bit abstract for the modern understanding of both "truth" and "madness," this original idea paved the way for the idea to grow and expand as others too it up. Foucault is one who later approaches the subject in *Madness and Civilization*, altering the same ideas for a modern understanding and a literary one as well. He states that "madness deals... with man and whatever truth about himself he is able to perceive," (Foucault 27) or, possibly, whatever truth about him the audience is able to perceive. This point Foucault privileges, returning to when he states, "madness is the false punishment of a false solution, but by its own virtue it brings to light the real problem, which can then be truly resolved" (Foucault 33). He argues that madness, while seemingly acting as a form of

concealment, is actually utilized as a way to reveal the truth. Again, while this doesn't relate to the history of the illness, it is paramount to a discussion of any art of literature that was produced at the time, as this was a prevailing trope.

When considering this context about the state of madness and the discussion surrounding it at the time when Shakespeare was writing, certain aspects and characters of multiple plays can be examined in a new light. Beginning with *Richard III* reveals that from fairly early on in his career, Shakespeare was working with this idea of duality as a clue to madness, as this early play is arguably the best example of the technique that he would continue throughout his later works. In a way, it establishes a precedent and creates a reference point for all works to follow, as it operates in the basic fashion of duality that descends into madness as the play progresses. In this work the duality functions as a window into the mind of the villainous Richard as he manipulates and murders his way into a position of power. His feelings, thoughts, and motives are explained in full through soliloquies and conversations with close confidants. The first example of this appears in the first two lines of the play: "Now is the winter of our discontent/ Made glorious summer by this son of York," (1.1.1-2). He continues to explain his reasoning, stating that he thrives in times of war that have recently ended and has no use for the idleness and pleasantries of the court life that will now follow. Before the audience knows anything else about this play, they are informed of the militaristic personality of the title character, his dissatisfaction with his current peaceful state of affairs, and the tone of the play. Richard craves conflict, and this immediate allusion to it suggest that it will pervade the story, and that he will be the cause. A few lines later in this same soliloquy, Richard outright states, "I am determined to prove a villain," (1.1.30) and admits to conspiring "To set [his] brother Clarence and the King/ In deadly hate the one against the other," by means of a prophecy "which says that G/ of Edward's heirs

the murderer [of the King] shall be,” (1.1.33-40). Within the same scene, just a few lines later, Clarence himself enters as he is led by a guard to the Tower, his crime being that his true name, George, starts with a G. Richard here plays the fool; having just informed the audience that the prophecy which has doomed his brother was a fabrication of his, he convinces Clarence that “this it is when men are ruled by women,” (1.1.62) insinuating that Edward’s wife is the cause. Within the first hundred lines of the play, the audience is given an in-depth look at the way in which Richard functions and manipulates those around him to achieve his goals. They see described a plot that Richard has laid and then see it immediately work as he has planned. Moreover, this soliloquy is followed immediately by a conversation with one of its subjects demonstrates the way in which Shakespeare is using this as a tool for comprehension as well as irony. The audience is in touch with Richard’s inner thoughts and motives, so they are able to follow his true personality as his false one is presented to most of the other characters in the play. This not only makes the play easier to understand but also creates a level of dramatic intrigue that would be lost without it.

Richard’s duality continues throughout much of the play, and there is hardly a scene in which his two personalities are not juxtaposed with each other, either through soliloquy or through conversation with his confidants, namely Buckingham and Catesby. However, by Act Four, and by the time that Richard is crowned acting King, his carefully constructed chicanery is beginning to fall apart, and the distinction between the two personalities is disappearing. There is no longer an abundance of soliloquies and internal dialogues, and the reasonable, politically savvy and cunning act falls away completely. The shift that occurs seems to begin with the treatment of the two princes, Richard’s nephews: Edward, Prince of Wales and Richard, Duke of York. As these two children are locked in the Tower of London, all the women in the play,

including Richard's wife Anne, begin to outwardly change their loyalties. The men are soon to follow, although for slightly different reasons. Buckingham is the only one to outwardly show any objection to the murder of the two boys, and this hint of doubt cast by him throws Richard into a rage, leading him to be suspicious of Buckingham and leading Buckingham to flee. This loss of one of his most trusted advisors is a critical turning point in the play. When this action is coupled with the completed murder of young Edward and Richard, Richard's carefully constructed world begins to swiftly undo itself, and his true personality is revealed as a war looms closer and his decisions and actions remain unreasonable and illogical. From this point it is not long before the King is found haunted by ghosts and begging, defeated, on the battlefield.

While Richard's actions towards others change drastically as the play progresses, it can be argued that Richard himself doesn't change at all throughout until the power-hungry and vengeful personality just overtakes the strategic act of normalcy that helped him climb his way into power. Thus, when the rest of the characters in the play begin to recognize this fault in his personality that is interpreted as madness, it is not a new development, it is a new realization about his existing character. The audience has been in touch with this obsessive side of his personality the whole time, meaning that when the false one dissolves and he moves into a madness that leads to his downfall, it inadvertently alters the perception of the Richard from the beginning of the play. Nothing has happened that would have changed his personality in such a drastic manner, as is the case with other characters and, as mentioned before, is another form of madness in his plays, leading to the conclusion that he has been on this path of madness the whole time. Thus, the duality that has existed from the beginning becomes a cue for his illness. His playing at a character was an effort to conceal his malevolent and power-hungry true self, and when his façade crumbles, the true personality is the one that takes over and leads his

madness into outward manifestation. When considering again what would have been known about the disease at the time, it follows pretty clearly the theory that Melancholia is characteristic of obsessive thoughts and intense internalization (clear from the beginning in the soliloquies and extreme focus on obtaining power) that eventually manifests into obsessive and strange (or violent) behavior. Shakespeare uses this duality and its eventual deconstruction very intentionally to allude to madness from the very beginning and to allow the audience an insight into the “truth” in the play, Richard’s honest thoughts, in order for them to fully understand the character and his sanity throughout. With such a strong and straight-forward adaptation of this technique, and considering its position on the likely timeline of all the plays, *Richard III* becomes a sort of standard when considering the way in which it is used in other works that is expanded and manipulated.

Despite the prominence and success with which Shakespeare included this technique early in his career with *Richard III*, it would be about seven years until he approaches the subject again at all with any distinction (*Hamlet*), and another five before it is taken up again in the same direct manner as the first play when he writes *King Lear*. From 1593 to 1605, as can be expected in a span of twelve years, much changes in Shakespeare’s personal life and career. In regard to the former, it is dotted with grief; he loses not only his son (aged eleven, thus more of a shock) but his father as well. His professional life was less grim during this time. Despite a brief closure of the theaters in the mid-1590s, Shakespeare becomes renowned for his plays, invited multiple times with the Chamberlain’s men to perform for Queen Elizabeth I, and later (as the King’s Men) for King James. He wrote and put to stage many of his most famous plays in this period, and the plays themselves during this time shift in nature. Probably due to his increase in popularity and growing reputation, Shakespeare moves away from the history adaptations that

dominated his early career and takes on more ambitious and creative projects that are less openly biased toward the monarch. He begins to write more original stories dealing with relevant issues of the human condition which appeal to multiple classes, instead of just retelling the history of the throne. One such issue is that of madness. While used heavily in *Richard III*, it was used very specifically to villainize the man who Queen Elizabeth's grandfather opposed. There is no other way that he could have used the topic in a play so framed to please the monarchy. In these later plays when the topic reappears, such as *King Lear* and *Hamlet*, Shakespeare has more freedom in who the duality affects and how it functions.

Looking at the presence of duality in these later works, *King Lear* is the closest to this "standard" that was established with *Richard III*. When considering madness as represented in Shakespeare's works, this is usually the most often discussed because of King Lear's descent into and journey out of a maddened state, which follows the tragedy-induced madness that was familiar to Elizabethan England. However, this particular play is full of characters that also depict madness as represented by duality, both in the main and sub plots. The two main figures that operate in such a way and exist in the forefront of the story are two of Lear's daughters, Goneril and Regan. The appearance of madness in these two is unique in itself in that women at this time were generally not the ones to be presented as mad. A modern audience is familiar with Shakespeare's habit of breaking this norm and the nineteenth- and twentieth-century constructions of female hysteria, but as Michael MacDonald states in his essay "Women and Madness in Tudor and Stuart England," in Shakespeare's day, "madness wore a masculine visage" (MacDonald 262). MacDonald draws on the evidence provided that men greatly outnumbered women when it came to cases reported and positions occupied in treatment houses. While this doesn't mean that women did not suffer as well, it is still true that women were less

likely to be the subjects of depictions of madness. Madness in woman was considered a more private issue and was something to be hidden, not discussed. Despite this fact, as hinted above, Shakespeare had a tendency to drive his female characters mad (the most notable example being *Hamlet's* Ophelia). Goneril and Regan are excellent examples in which he does so in the unique way of making them dual and false. They are, for most of the play, presented as a pair and act together in most of their decisions, and this characteristic of duality is something that they share as well. For both it is evident from the very first scene of the play, as it shows the two interacting with their father, their sister Cordelia, and each other. Their first scene shows the dividing of land in the kingdom, with Lear asking each of his daughters to describe their love for him in order to determine who gets what in the division. With this on the line, both pour out their love for their father in hyperbolic fashion, Goneril stating "I love you more than words can wield the matter," (1.1.55) and Regan retorting "I am alone felicitate/ In your dear Highness' love" (1.1.75). Here their falsity is hinted at through the pair's juxtaposition with Cordelia, and her steady insistence that she does not need words to prove her love as she does so in her actions, but it is later outright addressed when Lear leaves the scene and Cordelia accuses them in saying, "I know what you are" (1.1.273) In return they are cool and dismissive, and with Cordelia's banishment, they are left to continue their ruse and are next seen conversing with each other, pondering what to do with their father and how his actions negatively affect them and their plan. They part with a resolution to continue their action, with Goneril stating, "We must do something, and i' the heat" (1.1.310). In this one scene it is thus revealed that the two are acting together against their father, using a dual personality to fool him and others in order to overtake him. They present a loving and innocent front to many, but in speaking with Cordelia or plotting

with each other (situations whose outcomes would not impact their success) their true vindictive and power-hungry personalities are revealed.

Much like Richard III, the double personality that is evident here is presented as a means to an end, as Goneril and Regan seem to be using their false characteristics in order to gain power from their father. Unlike Richard III, however, this is achieved rather quickly, as within this first scene both daughters have succeeded in gaining control of the kingdom. More specifically, they have succeeded in gaining control of the kingdom for their husbands, but in the time depicted in the play (probably eighth century b.c.) this was about as close as a woman could get. Besides this, the play progresses, it is clear that the women have considerable influence over all the men in their lives. Regardless, Goneril and Regan succeed in what they set out to accomplish. The similarity returns in that the true nature of each woman begins to be uncovered after this power is achieved and is amplified as the play progresses. After the first scene, the next interaction that either daughter has with their father begins to reveal to him their true nature and intention, as they insist on the disbandment of his guard and support each other against him. They begin to refer to his agedness and inability directly and to his face. When trying to convince her father to return to Goneril after she had wronged him, Regan states, "O, Sir, you are old/... you should be ruled and led..." (2.4.146). Before this point, the two reserved this kind of criticism for private conversations, and its direct appearance here is the first sign that their crafted duality is beginning to slip. They also begin to mistreat his men, as is evident when Kent is put in the stocks. The fact that their true personalities are linked to their access to power becomes increasingly evident when the presence of Cordelia and a French army begins to challenge their position, as from this point on their actions begin to become more rash and violent. Upon discovering the character Gloucester's role in the event, Regan and her husband

capture him and put out his eyes. This drastic increase in violence and rash decisions indicates the destruction of their carefully crafted duality and thus suggests madness, as their decisions and reasoning become increasingly irrational and almost pointless, specifically for Regan. The final turning point for Goneril, however, does not take place until the end of the play. Here it is revealed that although the sisters seemed to be in each other's confidence, the same duality that they used to manipulate those around them has also existed between them the whole time as they have both been cheating on their husbands with the same man, Edmund, and keeping it from each other. Edmund has just returned to court at the beginning of the play, meaning that the affair of each has grown and developed alongside their vindictive and increasingly cruel personalities. The parallelism between these plot lines supports the idea that their duality has a basis in a growing and advancing melancholia. Once Regan's husband dies and she reveals to her sister that she plans to marry Edmund, this connection that the two have had throughout the play breaks, and their more significant feat of falsity crumbles. In this, Goneril is finally driven to reveal the same level of madness and violent tendencies that her sister showed in her treatment of Gloucester. In retaliation to her sister's actions, Goneril poisons Regan before stabbing herself. In this way, despite the outward duality that the pair used to gain power and then lose it, it was ultimately the duality and falsity that was employed between them that led to their downfall. When looking at the way in which duality and double personalities functioned as a whole for Goneril and Regan in *King Lear*, much like in *Richard III*, by the end of the play the duality in the beginning can be seen as a clue for the characters' madness. There is no major event to change the personality of either, the vindictive and violent personality just overtakes the benevolent façade. It is very much the loss of self that was so widely explored at the time, as the

person each of them is at the end is not who they were thought to be, or even who they truly were to each other in the beginning.

While Goneril and Regan are the main representations of duality in the play, the character Edmund also works as a primary example of duality-disguised madness that exists in the subplot of *King Lear*. Functioning in a way that is closer to Richard III, Edmund communicates his true self with the audience through soliloquy while presenting his false one to almost everyone else in the play, primarily his father and his brother. His intentions are outlined in scene two of act one in which he laments about his position as a bastard, stating, “Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land:/... Edmund, the base/ Shall top the legitimate” (1.2.16-21). In this, while he directly targets his brother, he refers to his father and his father’s actions multiple times, making it abundantly clear that he blames them both for his miserable situation in life and plans to take action against them in order to gain what Edgar has right to. He soon begins to act falsely to both. In framing Edgar for trying to overtake his father, Edmund maintains a ruse with each, succeeding in helping to send Edgar into hiding from his father while at the same time fabricating evidence against him. Later on in the play, he is the one to turn his father’s letter in to Regan and her husband, which ultimately leads to Gloucester’s mutilation. Besides this, as discussed above, he also knowingly takes part in the destruction of Goneril and Regan.

While it is clear that Edmund operates in a similar system of duality throughout, his differs from the other depictions in this play and the other plays. Unlike Richard III, Goneril, and Regan, his actions in the play do not increase in severity throughout, nor is there an apparent loss of control on his part. His downfall is a duel with his brother. However, there are other aspects of his character that suggest madness in a way that is not apparent with the other characters, specifically ones that occur in his own speeches. Through some of Edmund’s other

character traits it becomes evident that Shakespeare is using some of the other well-known theories of madness to enforce and highlight his support of the emerging idea of duality. In his primary soliloquy, there is evidence of heavy repetition, specifically with the words bastard or base. In one line, he states, “Why brand they us/ With base? with baseness? bastardy? base, base?” (1.2.9-10). Accompanying the repetition, specifically in this line, is a lack of proper structure, as he drops words in between and forms sentences that don’t quite make sense. This type of speech is a common feature used to indicate madness in characters. Examples of cryptic language in this same play can be seen in other characters that are more outwardly mad, as in Lear himself or “Tom O’Bedlam,” the antic character that Edgar takes on in hiding, making such lexicon more recognizable as a feature with Edmund. Besides his illogical speech, Edmund’s first soliloquy also contains a clue to his possible insanity in its many references to nature, beginning in the first line as he states, “Thou, nature, art my goddess,” (1.2.1) and continuing throughout. A maddened state, especially in the plays of Shakespeare, is commonly associated with nature. Again, this can be found later in the play in more apparent examples with Lear and Edgar who are both turned out into nature and there experience their maddened state, one real and one feigned. This self-proclaimed madness continues into Edmund’s second soliloquy, in which he again appeals to aspects of nature through referencing astronomy:

...My
 father compounded with my mother under the
 dragon's tail; and my nativity was under Ursa
 major; so that it follows, I am rough and
 lecherous. Tut, I should have been that I am,

had the maidenliest star in the firmament
twinkled on my bastardizing... (1.2.131-136)

Here Edmund seems to be himself outwardly admitting that there is something amiss with him that cannot be changed, and is using astronomical influences to explain it. As discussed above, the idea of astronomy and the solar systems as contributing factors to an individual's sanity or lack thereof had been a popular theory. Although not as prevalent at this time, it would have still been a well-known and likely credible theory of madness. When coupling these statements with the evidence found in the earlier soliloquy it is clear that Edmund is mad to some degree. In this way, although his duality in this play does not break down in the same way to reveal his madness, it is indicated from the beginning in his own words. Aside from this, his presence ties back into the argument made by Foucault cited at the beginning of the essay in that his attempt to conceal the truth and replace it with falsity ultimately leads to his plot's failure, his downfall, and the revelation of the truth after all. As stated above, this is a key function of a "madman" within a story, adding further evidence to Edmund's presence as one. Since the other characteristics are solidified as features of madness in other characters and other plays, while it doesn't function in the same way, the duality that he portrays is another clue to support the established trait of madness, making Edmund himself another example.

Looking at such characters as Goneril, Regan, and Edmund in *King Lear*, especially in comparison to the title character of *Richard III*, show how developed and persistent this idea of madness as duality was in Shakespeare's plays. It is extremely evident and well executed in one of the earliest works of his career, but also in one of his latest, as the main characters experience the same pattern of obsession, dual nature, and eventual loss of control that characterized certain types of madness in the Elizabethan era. However, while utilizing this literal and direct

manifestation of the malady, Shakespeare also took the opportunity in between the two plays discussed above to insert it into plays through characters who do not directly suffer from madness, but rather understand and utilize it to their advantage. The best-known of these, and probably the best-known Shakespeare play in general, is *Hamlet*.

Furthering the conversation started about duality and madness through the characters Richard III, Goneril and Regan, and Edmund, Shakespeare employs Hamlet's dual personality in a different way than his predecessors, as he makes a deliberate effort to convince madness, not to hide it. While it is heavily debated by many scholars whether Hamlet is just acting mad or is actually mad, Duncan Salked, in his book *Madness and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*, makes an excellent point when he states, "the madness of the Prince, real or feigned, is produced out of contradictory forces" (Salked 92). While this analysis takes the stance that Hamlet is not truly mad, it should be noted that duality is central to the play, and the character, regardless. Returning to a comparison of Hamlet to those characters previously discussed, as is the case with the other examples, one side of Hamlet is rational and "normal," the other is the madman. Where Hamlet differs is in the clear distinction between his two personalities that remains throughout all five acts. Besides this, more than any other of Shakespeare's characters in any play, Hamlet shares nearly all of his thoughts with the audience, giving them an extensive insight into his plans and motives. His primary means of this communication, as was the case with Richard III, comes in the form of soliloquy. This trend of keeping the audience close to the title character's thoughts is evident from his first appearance. In act one scene two Hamlet emerges into the story, and is almost immediately thrown into soliloquy. Here he informs the audience about not only what is happening within his family and the court at Denmark, but also what is happening within his mind, stating his wish that "the Everlasting had not fixed/ His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!"

(1.2.131-132), referring to the fact that suicide is a sin in most Christian religions, making his depressed state evident from the beginning. This passage is significant in that it not only centers the play on the inner conflict of Hamlet that will remain key throughout the story, but it also establishes a link between Hamlet and the audience. Besides this, it also establishes a sort of trust between the two as well. This first admission to the audience is simply one of emotion, not yet an explanation of calculation or deception. Besides this, it aligns with what had been expressed in the short dialogue that precedes the soliloquy between the king, the queen, and Hamlet. In response to his mother's inquiry about why he "seems" so sad and dejected, Hamlet vehemently states that it "seems" that way because it is so, claiming, "These indeed seem,/ For they are actions that a man might play./ But I have that within which passes show; These but the trappings and the suits of woe" (1.2.83-86). This is followed only by more insisting that he "throw to earth" his sorrow, which Claudius and Gertrude deem unnecessary (1.2.106). Because the above soliloquy follows this particular interaction between Hamlet and other characters in the play, and because what he states in his admonition to the audience reflects exactly what was dismissed by his parents, Hamlet gains credibility in the eyes of his audience, making it clear that "private" Hamlet visible to the audience does not differ substantially from the "public" one. There are things that he does hide in his dialogue with others, like his disgust with his mother, and he does express his feelings in a more extreme way in the soliloquy. However, there is not the intrinsic malice within him that is clear from the beginning with characters like Richard III or Goneril and Regan, and all of his anger is provoked and clearly explained within his monologue. Thus a pattern is established in the scene and the way the soliloquy functions, before the real action of the play begins, that although Hamlet is troubled, he is mentally sound.

After this, yet still within the first act, by scene five the play has progressed greatly in that Hamlet has spoken to the ghost of his father, learned of his uncle's true nature, and taken up his own dual nature for the purpose of achieving his goal. While this sounds familiar to the events of the plays previously discussed, there are differences that set Hamlet apart, the primary one being that which was outlined above. At the point in which Hamlet's personality diverges, the audience has been introduced to his true nature through things like the soliloquy in scene two, the way in which he interacts with other characters, and the way in which these things converge to create one reading of his personality. There is nothing thus far to indicate anything strange about him, other than his persistent sadness resulting from the death of his father. However, in scene five Hamlet actively admits, not only to the audience but to his friends as well, that from that point forward he shall "put an antic disposition on" (1.5.181) with an intent that is expressed a few lines later when he states, "The time is out of joint. Oh cursèd spite/ That ever I was born to set it right!" (1.5.197-198). He has been bid by his father to avenge the latter's death, and he makes it his only goal in life at that point to do so, using a false loss of self as his tool. Like the other examples of madness as duality that exist within Shakespeare's plays, Hamlet's falsity has a distinct purpose in helping him achieve a goal. However, while others set out to benefit themselves or to cause harm to others, for him it is the goal to reveal truth and set right what his uncle Claudius has done wrong for the sake of his father's tortured spirit. Not only that, it is not a nice and charming personality that Hamlet claims he will adopt to achieve success, it is one of madness. Hamlet will play the deranged fool in order to further his intentions born from sanity and goodwill, not the other way around.

However, the most significant way that Hamlet's split character and play acting differs from the other examples provided by Shakespeare thus far is that it never moves beyond acting.

The key feature in the other characters which suggests that their duality is more than just strategy and is indeed madness is the fact that they lose the ability to control the sides and the two become indistinguishable from each other. While originally intended as an act, it is clear by the end that the madman (or madwoman) is no longer capable of switching between the false charm and their true self. They are no longer acting, or even attempting to do so, as the true personality (usually driven by greed and desire and manifesting in insanity) becomes the dominant one. This is not the case for Hamlet. Like others, his deliberate act (adopted to expose his uncle without suspicion) is over by the end of act four. At this point, his scheme of performing "The Mousetrap" has successfully erased any doubt he had about Claudius' guilt, he has confronted his mother with what he knows, and he is being run out of Denmark into a plot laid by the king to have him killed. Thus, one thing that sets him apart is it is a logical place for his "antic disposition" to come to an end. It was adopted, as was seen above, as a means to an end in order to better expose his uncle, gain time to make a decision, and more discretely work towards revenge. By this point in the play, Hamlet is exposed and there is no longer need for a disguise or an act to hide from the king, the queen, and their spies how he is really passing his time and for what reason. The duality in *Hamlet* comes to an end only when it is no longer effective, which cannot be said for other characters with the same malady.

Besides the timing of the end to his antics, one must also consider which side of Hamlet's personality becomes the dominant one for the last act of the play. As seen in other instances, what makes a character truly mad in this sense is the fact the greedy and often violent personality, which was originally intended to be kept at bay, is the one which gains dominance over the character, leading to a loss of control, or rather a loss of self. However, with Hamlet, the personality which dominates the other is the normal, sane one. As discussed at length above, the

audience is well familiarized with Hamlet's true character in the second scene of the play, giving them a solid frame of reference for when things become muddled with his acting the madman. Because of this basis, when Hamlet stops switching between fronts for different characters, it is clear to the audience that this is not a convergence of self in which one aspect of his personality takes over the other, it is simply an abandonment of the disposition that was very intentionally adopted in the first act and a return to the character that was so clearly outlined in scene two. Anger and frustration with the state of Denmark and his family are still prevalent and driving factors in his behavior, but it is no different than what was clear in him before the duality entered his character. Besides this, one aspect of this original personality that is retained (and which is lost in any other example of this loss of self) is the ability to think and act logically. He is able to escape the death laid out by Claudius, speak reasonably and apologetically to Laertes, and address some final words of instruction to Horatio, asking him to tell the true story, stating, "in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,/ To tell my story" (5.2.348-349). This plea on Hamlet's part is another clue that his maddened state was an act, as it suggests that what he has been presenting to the outside world, his antic disposition, is not the truth. Besides soliloquy, Horatio functions as a main conduit for insight into Hamlet, as he is the one confidant that Hamlet has during his act throughout the story. Hamlet is able to call up the fact that he will be remembered for the madness he put on if Horatio does not reveal all, showing that he is still clearly distinguishing the two sides of himself, even as he dies. Death is the typical marker that madness has completely overtaken a character. It does not have that affect here. Hamlet succeeds where those like Richard III or Goneril and Regan fail, as he is not overtaken by his intended ruse and is able to remain in that state of mind that hatched the plan from the beginning until his demise, further evidence that the personality he maintains through the end is not one of madness.

As is evident in the paragraphs above, the duality and madness exhibited in *Hamlet* resembles closely the way in which Shakespeare uses the trope in his plays *Richard III* and *King Lear* while also diverging from the tradition in important ways. Here Shakespeare's participation in the conversation of the malady is not simply a literal translation of the madness in which a person's dual nature devolves into a loss of self, but rather a manipulation of the idea to complicate and add complexity to the plot. Madness for Hamlet is less of an ailment that befalls him, and more of something that is, to an extent, projected onto him that he, in turn, uses to his advantage. There is evidence throughout that the king, the queen, and Polonius all believe him to be mentally unbalanced in some way, even before he begins his antics, and he uses this established belief that they hold in order to divert their focus and achieve his goals with minimal involvement. Hamlet plays into the established idea held by the other characters that a change in personality was an indication of insanity, and Shakespeare does the same to his audience. Part of the attraction of *Hamlet* and a point that is still highly contested by modern readers is whether or not its title character is actually insane. While evidence in the play clearly supports that it is a ruse rather than an actual affliction, the prevalence of this argument and the sustainability of this debate shows just how well Shakespeare understands, and is thus able to convincingly work with and alter, madness in his plays.

Hamlet is not the only play in which he does this manipulation either (although, chronologically, it is probably the first). In *Twelfth Night*, written either the same year or just after *Hamlet*, the character Malvolio is tricked and framed by others in the play, who create a sort of artificial duality of his personality in the mind of his love interest Olivia by leaving false notes that cause him to alter his behavior towards her. This imbalance and change in his behavior lead to the general consensus that he is insane, and he is locked up for it. Even within *King Lear*,

where duality is treated so literally, there is the presence of it as a deliberate act as well. Edgar, after being run off by his brother Edmund's lies, undertakes the persona of "Tom O'Bedlam," an insane beggar, in order to hide himself from those who hunt him and plan his next move while also staying close enough to home to retain the ability to act when need be.

The primary importance of studying madness as it appears in Shakespeare's plays is it alters an understanding of the text itself. This madness of duality, for Shakespeare, is a tool for plot as well as characterization. It adds to the story itself, keeping it moving and adding situations that would not be possible if madness was not included. More than that, however, it is used to add depth to characters that are otherwise fairly straightforward. Richard III, Goneril, Regan, and Edmund are all usually considered to be simply villainous. When examining their characters in light of madness as it was understood at the time, however, they become complex, dynamic figures whose actions are better understood. The frame of madness allows Shakespeare to move beyond the simple binary of good versus evil to create figures that are more realistic and believable but effective in their roles. For Hamlet, Shakespeare's manipulation of madness affords the character a certain amount of ambiguity. His internal struggle is amplified by a feigned duality that is convincing enough to be the subject of debates centuries after it was first put on. For a character like Malvolio, the madness thrust upon him by other characters in the play adds to both the character's depiction as a ridiculous and comedic figure, but also his sympathetic nature as well. Madness, as Shakespeare uses it, is one of the playwrights best tools for characterization and storybuilding.

While madness has an important function in Shakespeare's plays themselves, it also adds significantly to the larger conversation surrounding madness in the sixteenth century. Although an understanding of Elizabethan madness can be drawn from the medical and scientific literature

of the time, this depiction and exploitation of the malady found in other cultural aspects, such as the plays of William Shakespeare, helps support conclusions drawn from the more specialized and isolated texts. As discussed, Shakespeare still utilized the older, existing ideas about madness and its causes in a number of plays and characters quite effectively. However, what sets his plays and his discussion of the illness apart is his venture into the newer theories of the period emerging with figures like Timothie Bright. In many ways, Shakespeare's plays are some of the best sources to exist that offer insight into what it meant to be insane in the period of the Renaissance, showing a preliminary understanding of concepts that would not be fully explored until centuries later, like the schizophrenia or the idea that madness could be convincingly faked. Further, this presence of such depth and breadth of understanding of madness within Shakespeare's plays shows that it was widely understood in Elizabethan society, to such an extent that the average spectator of the play would be able to recognize it not only in a literal representation but also in a slight manipulation. It is likely that different classes of people in the audience would have drawn and understood different aspects of the plays as they related to their situations. However, the extent to which madness pervades multiple works as well as multiple classes and genders within the works suggests that this was a universal issue meant to attract and resonate with all. The fact that madness in the plays is still widely studied and debated indicates that this is probably a correct assumption, and that it likely did appeal to a large majority of Shakespeare's audience. Not only does Shakespeare use these audience assumptions to help characterize his subjects and complicate the plot, he also challenges these assumptions by exploring the topic in new ways. As stated, the theory of melancholia and duality as madness was one new to the sixteenth century, and while madness would have been highly recognizable, this manifestation of it might not have been. In mixing his representations of the malady (the

familiar with the less recognizable), as well as providing such detailed and clear examples of the loss of self, Shakespeare was helping advance the discussion and understanding of madness as whole. Thus, it may not be a coincidence, given Shakespeare's popularity in the cultural and educational center of London in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, that the latter period saw an unprecedented increase in the study and treatment of madness. I find it unlikely that this was not impacted in some way by the attention attracted through the cultural phenomenon that was William Shakespeare.

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