What is't to be nothing else but mad:

Understanding Madness Through *Hamlet*

by

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Abstract

In the four-hundred some years since it was written, *Hamlet* has been the subject of a wealth of critical interpretations. Foremost among them is the psychological approach, which reached its apex with Freud's Oedipus Complex, but began several centuries prior. However, *Hamlet* is not only a common target of psychoanalysis, but has also been used to justify various psychiatric innovations throughout history. In this thesis, I will examine the long history of *Hamlet* criticism and of the psychological sciences, intertwining them throughout. Through this history, I hope to draw parallels between increasing taxonomies of madness and the disappearance of symptoms, as described by Foucault, to changes in the ways critics read *Hamlet*, indicating larger culture shifts. I will also show how early psychologists used Shakespeare as a cultural authority on which to establish themselves in positions of power and knowledge.

In Chapter One, I will give a brief history of Western insanity as it revolves around *Hamlet*, beginning with the pre-1600 views of the mind that Shakespeare would have been familiar with, and continuing on into the 1600s and 1700s, as social and medical views towards insanity gradually changed. Throughout, I will pair historical medicine with contemporaneous interpretations of Shakespeare. In Chapter Two, I detail the significant shift in both medicine and *Hamlet* criticism that begins in the late 1700s and grows throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While psychology struggled to establish itself as a respectable science, theories of insanity turned from construing it as an illness marked by physical antics and uncouth behavior to something more insidious and invisible, though treatable. At the same time, *Hamlet* began to be used by psychologists not only to illustrate their theories, but to justify them. In the literary world, critics began to do the same, co-opting new psychological theories to construct new versions of both Hamlet and Shakespeare.

Chapter Three attempts to answer the question *why Hamlet*? Why was Hamlet, of all literary characters, the favored subject of the analysis? In it, I consider the role of theatrical and metatheatrical imagery within the play. In acknowledging theatre on-stage, Hamlet aligns himself more with the audience than with other characters, thus transgressing the boundary between stage and audience. In the end, this invites Hamlet to be analyzed more than other fictional characters. Finally, I conclude with Chapter Four, which uses a Foucauldian and archetypal lens to analyze the transformation of insanity that took place in the eighteenth century. While literary critics and psychologists were both wielding and reinventing *Hamlet* and psychology, they were not working without influence on purely scientific or academic principals, but actively—if unintentionally—creating systems of normalcy.

Key Words: Hamlet, Shakespeare, psychiatry, history, Foucault, theatre, social psychology, archetypes

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Introduction: *Who's there?*

❦

Bernardo: Who's there?

Francisco: Nay, answer me: stand, and unfold yourself.[1]

A dark theatre. An empty stage. A lonely figure steps into the limelight. A guard. He's the first character to be seen, to be heard. He turns to look offstage and calls out, *who's there*?

In the world of *Hamlet*, Bernardo is approaching a silent spot outside the castle. He's searching for the guard whose shift he's taking over. Maybe he sees a movement—he's jumpy. The ghost of the late King Hamlet has been walking these same paths during the darkest hours of the night, and tensions between Denmark and Norway have been escalating. It's a difficult time to be a night guard at Elsinore. Bernardo cries out—*who's there*? But it's not just a question directed towards the waiting Francisco, but to the silent, watching audience. Who's there, out in that dark crowd? Who's there, watching these events unfold? *Who's there*? But Bernardo is immediately rebuffed. Francisco demands that Bernardo instead answer *him*, Bernardo complies, and the play progresses. Bernardo's question is never answered, and the audience is spared from speaking up.

Hamlet starts with a question; it's a play full of, and about, questions. Its most famous line defines *the* question. Horatio questions the superstitions of the nightwatch; Gertrude questions Hamlet's melancholy; Hamlet questions his will to live; Laertes questions Hamlet's intentions and Ophelia's virtue; Ophelia questions Hamlet's affections; Polonius questions the

[1] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* I.1.1-2

cause of Hamlet's madness, while Claudius questions its veracity. Questions flow easily in *Hamlet*. But like Bernardo's initial query, answers are not always as forthcoming.

And it's the unanswered questions that fascinate audiences long after they leave the theatre. *Is the ghost real? Is Gertrude guilty? What's Hamlet's real relationship with Ophelia? Is Hamlet mad? Hamlet* is one of the most influential works ever to grace the English canon—perhaps only second to the King James bible. Asking questions about *Hamlet* is about as cliché as it can get.[2] And yet still, four hundred years after the first audiences left Shakespeare's theatre, we still question. We still try to step in, and fulfill the role that Franscico first denied us.

I first read *Hamlet* in 2015, towards the end of my junior year of high school. I very quickly fell head-over-heels. We were assigned to read it over the course of a few weeks—I sat down to read the first three scenes, and a few hours later, found myself at *goodnight sweet prince*. I found a full-cast audiobook, and read it again the next day to the sound of swords clashing and a full-cast narration. I had always had a vague understanding that I was going to do English something-or-other in college. I liked reading. I liked (creative) writing. But *Hamlet* was what made me an English Language and Literature major. It was the first time I dove into academic texts and analyses, falling down rabbit holes of citations and offhand mentions. Back then, my access to the literature was confined to JSTOR, and on rare occasions, an archive that felt like the shady websites I used to use to download free .epub files of young adult paranormal romance novels, which I later recognized as the HathiTrust Digital Library. Without the liberal JSTOR access granted by having the right .edu account, I ended up making three burner emails

[2] Nearly a hundred years ago, in 1929, John D. Rea began his article "Hamlet and the Ghost Again" with a note that

> Too much has already been written, it would seem, upon all the problems connected with Hamlet. It is only apologetically that I take up a theme so hackneyed as indicated by the title of this note, and with no thought that what is herein said is really new.

John D. Rea, "Hamlet and the Ghost Again," *The English Journal,* Vol. 18, No.3. March 1929, pg. 207

to go with my three JSTOR accounts, where my digital bookshelf could only hold four articles at a time.

In some respect, this spiraling obsession was likely due our assignment of *Hamlet* ending up coincident to my diagnosis of Major Depressive Disorder. I can't say how it felt to read *Hamlet* without falling into platitudes. It was life-changing, a beacon of light in stormy seas, I felt like I was no longer alone, so on and so forth. In 2015, recent efforts towards the de-stigmatization of mental health disorders were just hitting their stride; it seemed like everyone was coming out and professing their struggles with depression and anxiety. And while I would never argue that we should retreat back into the asylum closet, to a lonely seventeen year old struggling to understand what it meant to have a severe mental illness, the sheer abundance of people professing the same symptoms was not comforting. Not everyone could have depression. Someone had to be faking it; it was probably me, but maybe (just maybe) it was all of us. It took a 1600s Danish prince standing alone in a room and asking himself "To be, or not to be—" for depression to feel like a reality.

It was not just the power of what I felt was Shakespeare's perfect articulation of depression, but the acknowledgement of it within the vast body of critical analysis of *Hamlet*. More than anything, *Hamlet* literary critics are interested in the question of Hamlet's sanity. Who hasn't learned about Freud and Oedipus complexes after a high school English teacher introduced psychoanalytic criticism during their Shakespeare unit? *Hamlet* is not a plot-driven play. It's a play where the majority of characters die within one scene after five meandering acts, and the plot hinges on an off-stage pirate raid and the title character's mysterious and only once-mentioned elevation to pirate commander; it's not a play with a plot that can withstand

particularly deep thought. Yet Hamlet—the man, the character—*does* invite analysis, seemingly with open arms.

It was not only a felt acknowledgment of Hamlet's melancholy in the literary criticism associated with *Hamlet*—part of what attracted me was the sheer, unadulterated adoration critics clearly had for Hamlet, melancholy and all. Up until then, academic articles had seemed dull, pointless, and something to read—and possibly in the future, write—only for an equally tedious assignment. But *Hamlet*'s critics wrote with palpable love. Dover Wilson expresses it in *What Happens in Hamlet*, which has since become a standard resource for any starting *Hamlet* scholar, that he "knew no more about *Hamlet* than the average reader" until he, a man in the middle of World War I riding a train on the way to inspect the Ministry of Munitions, read an article that claimed Hamlet's vision of the Ghost was nothing but the workings of an overwrought brain, confusing memories of plays with reality,[3] and became so offended on Hamlet's behalf that he "forgot [...] The Ministry of Munitions, the War itself."[4]

Or maybe we should look for adoration in Edward P. Vining, who believed that the only explanation for Hamlet's lack of resolve and soft-heartedness was that Hamlet was born female, but nevertheless introduces Hamlet as "a hero, who, weak and vacillating [...] there is yet revealed a depth of human feeling, and a knowledge of the inmost springs that move the puppets who we call mankind, before which humanity bows."[5] Or we could listen to Samuel T. Coleridge, who succumbs to characteristic poetry and muses that "few have seen a celebrated waterfall without feeling something akin to disappointment: it is only subsequently that the image comes back full into the mind, and brings with it a train of grand or beautiful associations.

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[3] Dover Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet*, "An epistle discovery," pg. 5
[4] *Ibid.* pg. 7
[5] Edward P. Vining, *The Mystery of Hamlet*, pg. 11

Hamlet feels this; his senses are in a state of trance, and he looks upon external things as hieroglyphics. His soliloquy: *O! that this too too solid flesh would melt,* &c springs from that craving after the indefinite—for that which is not—which most easily besets men of genius."[6]

Though separated by a hundred years,[7] all three authors—and they are but a small sample—express the same things. An interest in Hamlet's mind, whether that was a defense of it, an acknowledgement of his weakness, or an exploration of the long association between genius and melancholy. And they all, purposefully or not, refer to Hamlet as man.[8] Wilson is not offended on Shakespeare's behalf, but on Hamlet's; Vining thinks Hamlet reveals a depth of human feeling, and Coleridge directly claims he understands how Hamlet thinks!

At the end of my high school Shakespeare unit, I wrote my final paper—confidently entitled "*Hamlet* Essay" and totaling an epic 4.5 pages—on Horatio. Barring the prince himself, Horatio was my favorite character.[9] I argued that Horatio was the most important character in the play for his role as an audience stand-in, meant to guide the reader (watcher) through the "twists and turns" of Hamlet's mind and the duplicitousness of the Danish court. A sample from that paper:

> In a play where the majority of characters are varying degrees of mad, vengeful, or dead, audiences can sympathize with the plight of the tragic hero Hamlet, the character audiences would ordinarily most strongly associate themselves with, but can feel nothing but disconnect between themselves and the characters. No matter how empathetic audiences may be, they cannot hope to follow Hamlet's labyrinthian thoughts of revenge

[6] Samuel T. Coleridge, & A Roberts. *Coleridge: Lectures on Shakespeare (1811-1819)*, "Lecture 3: The 1818-1819 Series," pg. 143
[7] Dover's *What Happens in Hamlet* was published in 1935; Vining's *The Mystery of Hamlet* was published in 1881, and Coleridge's lecture took place between 1818 and 1819.
[8] Or, in Vining's case, human
[9] This is a bold claim, considering the prevalence of lines like "While Horatio's constant appearances on stage give him the illusion of importance, the bulk of his actions have little impact," and "Horatio's lines reflect similar insignificance."

that weave through the ravages of his fevered mind. Horatio, for both Hamlet and the audience, is a beacon of sanity in an ocean of madness.

That's a bold claim, made bolder for being an outright lie. Feel nothing but disconnect? Can't hope to follow Hamlet's thoughts? Hah! Not only is that not historically true—centuries of *Hamlet* criticism is rife with people who claim nothing *but* a connection with Hamlet and an understanding of his thoughts—but it wasn't even true for me. Like every person who's tried to dip their toes into the bottomless pool of *Hamlet* criticism, I was convinced that I—perhaps I alone!—understood what Shakespeare was going for with Hamlet.

No doubt Wilson thought the same thing when he wrote "In *Hamlet* Shakespeare set out to create a hero labouring under mental infirmity;"[10] no doubt Vining thought it when he postulated Hamlet's identity disorder. No doubt Sigmund Freud and Ernest Jones thought it when they wrote of Hamlet's Oedipus Complex.[11, 12] No doubt Coleridge thought it when he diagnosed Hamlet with an overpowered faculty of imagination.[13] No doubt this applies, in some respect, to every author who's theorized about Shakespeare's most thoughtful character.

Hamlet is a play about questions. More than any other, the question that seems to stay with audiences is the question of Hamlet's madness. And invariably, a few people will walk away convinced they've found the answer. It's to these critics, and these questions, that this thesis is dedicated. I make no effort to draw out the solution to the madness where so many have tried before. Rather, I hope to explain why we, as a culture, have decided that this question is important, why we've decided to ask it about Hamlet, and how we've used the answers we've found.

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[10] Dover Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet*, "The heart of the mystery," pg. 218
[11] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*
[12] Ernest Jones, *Hamlet and Oedipus*
[13] Samuel T. Coleridge, & A Roberts. *Coleridge: Lectures on Shakespeare (1811-1819),* "Lecture 3: The 1818-1819 Series," pg. 143

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I have tried to weave the same love for Hamlet into my writing as the critics before me. I can only hope that it rings true.

Chapter One: *To define true madness*

❦

> *Polonius*: I will be brief: your noble son is mad.
> Mad I call it, for to define true madness,
> What is't but to be nothing else but mad?
> But let that go[14]

Such is the definition of madness proposed by Polonius, the chief counselor to the throne of Denmark, as he speculates on the cause of Prince Hamlet's unexpected and wild behavior following his father's death. Polonius, a character known for his wandering sentences and his tendency to fill pages with tautologies, who once greeted the announcement of a troupe of actors arriving in Elsinore with a list of eleven different play genres,[15] here finds himself with an uncharacteristic lack of synonyms. For once, his claims of brevity hold some weight: Polonius calls Hamlet mad, because Polonius believes there is nothing else, no better thing, to call him. There's no list of symptoms, no diagnostic criteria presented as justifications. For Polonius, the definition of madness is recursive, circling around to bite its own tail. Madness (noun): "to be mad."

Such a simple answer could never last—had in fact never really been an answer. People have been attempting to diagnose, symptomize, treat, and discover the causes of madness as long as people have been going mad, and people have been going mad since humankind first

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[14] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* II.2.94-97

[15] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* II.2.390-396

> *Hamlet*: Then came each actor on his ass—
> *Polonius*: The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlimited. Seneca cannot be too heavy nor Plautus too light. For the law of writ and the liberty, these are the only men.

developed sanity. The history The history of psychology is complex and fraught, and layered with attempts to define what the notoriously wordy Polonius manages in three lines. To flip through generations of medical records is to see madness fractionated: from the mania, melancholia, and phrenzy that began in Ancient Greece[16] and lasted through the Renaissance,[17,18] to eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and early twentieth-century diagnoses of hysteria, the vapors, and acedia, to modern-day depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia. But regardless of this growing thesaurus of madness, these terms refer to a host of mental afflictions that today would be considered invalid diagnoses, if not outright offensive. But as we thumb through these records, it can nevertheless be tempting to see half-familiar terms and play word association games, fitting them jig-saw like with their modern 'synonyms.'

More and more, historians and psychologists are examining modern psychology, and the pre-modern psychology that forms its foundations. And more and more, people are questioning the legitimacy of psychology as a field; questions raised by the prevalence of mental illness in contemporary society. This is especially pertinent when it comes to looking at mental illness that appear to be common, such as depression and anxiety, two illnesses that have reached pandemic levels.[19] Around 8% of Americans adults have or have had depression,[20] raising the question: can a disease so prevalent it rivals the Spanish Influenza[21] be a disease? At what point does an abnormality become the norm? And where would a state where depression and anxiety were no longer abnormal leave psychologists?

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[16] William V. Harris, *Mental Disorders in the Classical World*, "The Early Greek Medical Vocabulary of Insanity," pg. 65
[17] Simon Kemp, *Medieval Psychology*, pg. 116
[18] Roy Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles: A history of madness in England from the restoration to the Regency*, pg. 18
[19] Laura Hirshbein, *American Melancholy: Constructions of Depression in the Twentieth Century*, pg. 5
[20] Debra J. Brody, Laura A. Pratt, and Jeffery P. Hughs, "Prevalence of Depression Among Adults Aged 20 and Over: United States, 2013-2016." NCHS Data Brief.
[21] Niall P.A.S. Johnson & Juergen Mueller. "Updating the Accounts: Global Morality of the 1918-1920 'Spanish' Influenza Pandemic." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, Vol. 76, No.1

For many, the best way to justify something as a current reality is to draw on established precedent. And the best way to find a historical precedent for the prevalence of mental illnesses is to point to old diagnoses and descriptions, and re-diagnose with updated terms in an attempt to forge a history for, say, depression. But time bars psychologists from real access to the patients behind the records. Psychologists will never be able to travel back in time and use the *DSM-V* to diagnose a patient themselves; thus, it is impossible at best and ethically dubious at worst to match *depression*, *acedia*, and *melancholy*, especially when that claim is being used to justify some kind of fundamental truth about psychiatric disorders.

In this chapter, I wish to establish a baseline from which to intelligently track developments and changes in psychology. I begin with the pre-1600s, with an abridged look at the theories of madness that are the foundations of Western psychology as we know it today; they are also important for being the theories that Shakespeare himself would have been the most familiar with. As a full survey of Western medieval medical psychology would fill more pages than I have room for, I have placed emphasis on the theories that it appears to me that Shakespeare utilize when writing, as well as theories that form the basis of later psychiatric practice. From the 1600s to the end of the 1700s, I continue to summarize emerging psychological thought, at the same time comparing it to contemporary literary criticism, especially of *Hamlet*, to emphasize how psychological theories seeped through and influence non-medical spheres, specially in showing social attitudes to madness and Shakespeare's plays. Throughout those two hundred years, I hope to draw attention to the ways in which doctors, as well as lay-people, recognized mental illness, as well as how they defined and categorized it.

I end this chapter with the eighteenth century, and begin Chapter Two with the nineteenth. Beginning in the 1800s, there is a radical change in how both psychology and *Hamlet* were viewed: rather than a merely tangential relationship between the two, Shakespeare (and *Hamlet* in particular) became an essential part of psychological thought, both as a way for psychologists to justify their theories, and as objects of psychoanalysts in themselves. I hope this change will seem all the more meaningful with the context given in the following pages.

I myself do not attempt tp comment on the truthfulness of mental illness. But psychology, like any other field of study, is man-made, and humans do not exist in a void, but respond to and create surrounding influences. In this, I hope to show the long relationship between literature and psychology.

SIR, A WHOLE HISTORY[22]

Pre-1600s

Many brief histories of psychology will begin in the late 1800s with Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), while a more comprehensive text might start with René Descartes (1596-1650) and mind-body dualism. This, however, is not meant to be a history of psychology—it's a history of psychology as it relates to *Hamlet*, and it thus follows to begin before Hamlet's appearance on Shakespeare's stage. Therefore, I begin with medieval (and some ancient) psychology, as it is

[22] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* III.2.323-330
Guildenstern: Good my lord, vouchsafe me a word with you.
Hamlet: Sir, a whole history.
G: The King, sir—
H: Ay, sir, what of him?
G: Is in his retirement marvelous distempered.
H: With drink, sir?
G: No, my lord, with choler.

what Shakespeare (1564-1616), however peripherally, would have been aware of and influenced by.

In attempting to summarize over a thousand years of complex medical, religious, and social history, much of importance has been necessarily skipped. To focus, I have stayed with the theories that, to my mind, we can see to some respect in *Hamlet*. Throughout, I use the term "madness" much as we would use "mental illness" today: as the largest taxonomic level that encompasses a wide range of specifics. For the most part, this is not reductive on my part; to the medieval physician, madness often was *the* diagnosis, with smaller categories of "insanity" or "mania" closer to symptoms than discrete illnesses.

As they did in most other aspects of natural philosophy, medieval physicians followed the general precepts laid down by the ancient Greeks.[23] Madness was not readily distinguished from any form of physical disorder, and like other illness, it was generally attributed to an imbalance of the humors.

Humoral theory's origins remains contested, though it seems to have been systematized in Ancient Greece and first applied to medicine by Hippocrates (460-370 BC) and Galen (129-201 AD). Connected to the classical idea of four elements (earth, air, fire, and water), humoral theory rests on the conceit of the four humors (liquids found in the human body). Each humor had different physical properties, and those physical properties were associated with a certain temperament. Blood was hot and moist, and was associated with a sanguine (active, enthusiastic) temperament; yellow bile was hot and dry, and associated with a choleric (aggressive, angry) temperament; phlegm was cold and moist, and associated with a phlegmatic

[23] Kemp, *Medieval Psychology*, pg. 116

(apathetic) temperament; and black bile was cold and dry, and associated with a melancholic (depressed) temperament.

Health was achieved through a balance of the four humors, and ill-health was caused by imbalance. For example, the word "melancholy" derives from the Greek *melankholía*, or black bile,[24] an excess of which would cause "depression, unreasonable fears, brooding over unimportant things, and frightening hallucinations."[25] Phrenitis, from which we derive the English word "frenzy," was characterized by wild, extreme emotion and believed to be caused by an excess of yellow bile.

The simplicity of the humoral theory was eventually supplemented with the "doctrine of the inner senses." Possibly deriving from medieval scholars' over-simplification of Galen's descriptions of the brain,[26] around the fourth century it was proposed that brains were composed of a number of linearly-arranged ventricles, and that each ventricle housed a separate 'inner sense.' Each inner sense worked as a filter for perceived information (perceived through the eyes, touch, etcetera). The total number of ventricles, number of inner senses, and number of inner senses per ventricle varied from physician to physician; in general, humans had three ventricles, each housing one of three senses: common sense, estimation/instinct, and memory.

The doctrine of the inner senses allowed for the differentiation of disorders that had similar symptoms. For example, while the terms "melancholy" and "mania" may conjure up two very different images for the modern reader, to humoral theory physicians, they were illnesses with virtually indistinguishable symptoms. It was eventually decided that melancholy was a

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[24] *Melankholía* (μελαγχολία); *mélas* (μέλας) = black, *kholḗ* (χολή) = bile
[25] Kemp, *Medieval Psychology*, pg. 118
[26] Simon Kemp & Garth J.O. Fletcher, "The Medieval Theory of the Inner Senses," *The American Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 106. No. 4, pg. 560-561

disorder of the first ventricle's imagination, while mania affected the second ventricle's reasoning power. [27] In short, the difference between melancholy and mania was: if the patient's imagination was affected, it was melancholy—for example, if they believed they had no head. If their reasoning was affected, it was mania—for example, a patient who "threw glass bustles out a window, but was able to name each one correctly"[28]

While witchcraft and demonic possession were also possible diagnoses for those exhibiting unusual behavior during the medieval period, they were not as common as popular culture would lead us to believe. 'Supernatural causes' was, for the most part, a diagnosis of last-resort, used when a patient had gone through several months of treatment without any signs of recovery. Many physicians outright rejected outright rejected any supernatural reasons, such as Jean Riolan (1580-1657)[29] who explained possession[30] as due to the "effect of melancholic capours on phantasy," going on to say that "it is not necessary for us to have resource to a demon as the last refuge of ignorance, since we have a natural cause."[31] On the occasion that supernatural forces were the final diagnosis, the physician generally handed the patient over to religious authorities.

The real problem of madness was not diagnosis, but treatment. Madness was easily recognizable; as Porter puts it, "Madness advertised itself in a proliferation of symptoms, in gait, in physiognomy, in weird demeanour and habits. It was synonymous with behaving crazy, looking crazy, talking crazy."[32] In fact, while madness was widely recognized as a medical

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[27] Kemp, *Medieval Psychology*, pg. 117
[28] Kemp, *Medieval Psychology*, pg. 117
[29] Thomas M. van Gulik, & Ivo Schoots. "Anastomosis of Riolan revisited: the meandering mesenteric artery." *Archives of Surgery*.
[30] Then called *enthusiasm*
[31] Temkin, *The Falling Sickness. A History of Epilepsy from the Greeks to the Beginnings of Modern Neurology*, pg. 138 as quoted in George Rosen, *Madness in Society: Chapters in the Historical Sociology of Mental Illness*, pg. 147
[32] Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, pg. 35

problem, it often did not require a medical opinion. English courts did not need a physician's testimony to hear an insanity defense; the accused's own demeanor was considered evidence enough, along with testimonies of changes in demeanor from friends and family.[33] Focus was generally on the manic character of the mad, though other temperaments were recognized: "wandering aimlessly or rushing madly about, ranting, elirium, impulsiveness, and suicidal tendencies" were all common features of the insane.[34] Madness was easily found; what to do with it was not nearly as simple.

For the most part, the mentally ill were kept in the custody of family or friends, especially among well-off families; only those "considered too dangerous to keep at home, or who had no one to care for them, or who were socially disturbing"[35] were taken in by the relevant authorities, whether governmental or religious. Those taken in were generally confined to prison or general hospitals; hospitals occasionally had special facilities for such patients.

In England, the most famous madhouse was the Hospital of St. Mary of Bethlem in London. While it would later be known as 'Bedlam,' the origin of the *bedlam* as a synonym for 'chaos,' and the archetypal horror movie asylum, it was originally meant to give alms and aid to the poor. By 1403, six of its nine inmates were "men deprived of reason,"[36] and in 1547, King Henry VIII regulated Bethlem for the exclusive use of the insane poor.[37] Treatment was often synonymous with confinement: in Paris, patients at the Hôtel-Dieu "were placed in beds that

[33] Sara M. Butler, *Forensic Medicine and Death Investigation in Medieval England*, "The Medical Dimension of a Coroner's Inquest," pg. 200
[34] *Ibid.,* pg. 200
[35] Rosen, *Madness in Society*, pg. 139
[36] *Ibid.*, pg. 139
[37] Torney & Miller, *The Invisible Plague: The Rise of Mental Illness from 1750 to the Present*, "The Birth of Bedlam," pg. 10

were enclosed and had two windows through which the patient could be observed and things handed to them. Patients placed in ordinary beds were attached to them by strong bonds."[38]

Both the humoral theory and the doctrine of the inner senses began to decline in the mid-1500s. The 1542 release of Andreas Vesalius's (1514-1564) anatomical illustrations in *De humani corporis fabrica*[39] and the abridged *De humani corporis fabrica librorum eptiome*[40] linked disease to anatomy and the gross function of the body, and Vesalius explicitly condemned the doctrine of the inner senses as "the inventions of those who never look into our Maker's ingenuity in the building of the human body."[41] The humoral theory held on until the eighteenth century, when it finally gave way to an understanding that insanity was caused by a pathological state of the brain.[42] But while the 1600s saw incredible advancements in medical sciences, the treatment and confinement of the mad remained much the same.

The 1600s

While the humoral theory and the doctrine of the inner senses faced a decline in popularity during the seventeenth century, they had not yet fallen from physicians' repertoire, let alone the public's awareness. While it would be difficult and frankly presumptuous to comment on how Shakespeare may or may not have been influenced by prevailing theories of the psyche, it seems safe to say he knew of humoral theory. Hamlet uses the double meaning of "choler" (anger) when talking to Guildenstern about Claudius's temperament;[43] humoral terminology was used as

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[38] Rosen, *Madness in Society*, pg. 140
[39] Trans. *On the fabric of the human body*
[40] Trans. *Abridgement of the fabric of the human body*
[41] Singer, *Vesalius on the human brain*, as quoted in Kemp & Fletcher, "The Medieval Theory of the Inner Senses," pg. 566
[42] Richard Lowry, *The Evolution of Psychological Theory: A Critical History of Concepts and Presuppositions*, pg. 55
[43] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* III.2.282-292

> *Guildenstern*: The king, sir, —
> *Hamlet*: Ay, sir, what of him?
> *G:* Is in his retirement marvellous distempered
> *H*: With drink, sir?

much by the public to talk about personality and mood as it was used by doctors to talk about medical imbalances. And in 1615, not too long after after the first quarto of *Hamlet* was published in 1603, Thomas Adams (fl. 1612-1653) published a book of sermons entitled *Mystical bedlam, or the vworld of mad-men*, which explains madness to his congregants using the doctrine of the inner senses.[44]

In the medical world, physicians were still searching for a way to define true madness, spurred on by both the diminishing belief in the theories that had once explained lunacy and its apparent abundance in Europe. Richard Burton's (1577-1640)*The Anatomy of Melancholy*, first published in 1621, explains that melancholia is "a disease so frequent [...] as few there are that feel not the smart of it."[45] And another physician, Thomas Beddoes (1760-1808), bemoaned that "Mad is one of those words, which means almost everything and nothing."[46]

Views of madness continued to evolve throughout the seventeenth century. The 1600s mark the beginning of what Foucault termed "The Great Confinement," though he acknowledges that this was less the case in England than in France.[47] Foucault claims that methods of dealing with the insane moved from primarily family care with incarceration an option only in extreme cases, to incarceration in prisons and hospitals becoming the main method of dealing with the

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> *G*: No, my lord, rather with choler
> *H:* Your wisdom should show itself more richer to
> signify this to his doctor; for, for me to put him
> to his purgation would perhaps plunge him into far
> more choler
> *G*: Good my lord, put your discourse into some frame and
> start not so wildly from my affair

Here, Hamlet twists Guildenstern's announcement of Claudius's anger/choler out of context, and declares that if he were to "purge" (a reference to bloodletting) Claudius of his choler, it would not be in the medical sense, but in the legal sense of *purgation*, the process of clearing oneself from the accusation of a crime. This, in turn, would only increase Claudius's anger/choler, making Hamlet's presence a less than helpful remedy.

[44] Thomas Adams, *Mystical bedlam, or the vworld of man-men*, "The Second Sermon," pg. 35

> "To vnderstand the force of madnesse, we must conceiue in the brayne three ventricles; as houses assign'd by Physitians for three dwellers, Imagination, Reason, and Memorie."

[45] Richard Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, "Democritus to the Reader," pg. 72

[46] Beddoes, Hygeia, iii, Tenth Essay, 40 as quoted in Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, pg. 24

[47] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, "The Great Confinement," pg. 38

insane. Rosen concurs, pointing out that changes in economic circumstances led to an increase of the vagrant poor and beggars, many of whom were mad (or passed themselves off as such to gain charity); this lead to the creation of organizations meant to unify hospitals, domiciliary relief, etcetera, under local and national authorities to systematically combat the problem.[48] There's some pushback on this theory: Porter considers the "great confinement" to be heavily exaggerated, and notes little increase in the population of madhouses until the 1800s, and that the first English Vagrancy Act linking lunatics with criminals did not come until 1714.[49]

Either way, the seventeenth century saw lunacy transformed into something of a spectator sport. Letters and other personal accounts from the period show that Bethlem Hospital was considered a must-see attraction while in London. Samuel Pepys (1633-1679) told his nieces and nephews "to see Bedlam" while they were in London.[50] In the 1650s, there were complaints that visitors were harassing the patients by "jest" or "knavery," and in 1681 Bethlem's board of governors expressed their concerns about "the greate quantity of persons that come daily to see the said Lunatickes."[51]

It was not just the "real" lunatics that attracted crowds. The mad were a constant source of entertainment, both real and fictional. The Elizabethan (1558-1603) and Jacobean (1603-1625) eras are renowned for the madmen that populated their stages. Shakespeare alone gives us plenty, from Hamlet and Ophelia, to King Lear, to Macbeth and his Lady. But there are also mad characters in Marlowe, Jonson, Webster, Massinger, Fletcher, Dekker, Middleton, Kyd, and a multitude of other playwrights.[52] Depictions of these mad characters pair neatly with what

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[48] Rosen, *Madness in Society*, pg. 160-161
[49] Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, pg. 7-9
[50] Torrey & Miller, *The Invisible Plague*, pg. 14
[51] *Ibid*. pg. 15
[52] *Ibid*. pg. 14

had already been said about madness. Madness was generally caused by "overwhelming emotional stress of human agency," extreme emotion brought on by sudden events, not because of supernatural forces or moral wrongdoing; King Lear and Ophelia are both good examples of this[53] The mad carried with them a host of visual and audible markers of madness: delusions, hallucinations, emotional lability, disordered speech, and a disheveled appearance—things easily conveyed upon the stage.[54]

The close relationship between the mad on the streets and the mad on the stage in part allows us to examine contemporary attitudes on the one using reactions to the other. In Jeremy Collier's 1698 censure of the English stage, he remarks on the trend towards the use of immodest madwomen as a source of titillation on the early English stage, comparing them to their ancient counterparts. Collier holds up *Hippolytus*' Phaedra as a paragon of madwomen; though Phaedra was driven mad with lust by the goddess Aphrodite, she manages to maintain decorum, and eventually commits suicide rather than break it. In contrast, he strongly criticizes *Hamlet*'s Ophelia, who is driven mad after the murder of her father by her lover's hand, and wanders around the stage in a state of some undress, singing bawdy songs. Collier makes note of the argument that madwomen are not sullying their reputation because "a Feavour has no Faults, and a Man *non Compos* [*non compos menti* = of unsound mind] may kill without Murther," but concludes that "such People ought to be kept in dark Rooms and without Company. To shew them, or let them loose," as is done with madwomen on stage, "is somewhat unreasonable."[55]

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[53] J. Thomas Dalby, "Elizabethan Madness: On London's Stage," *Psychological Reports*, pg. 1341

[54] *Ibid*. pg. 1342

[55] Jeremy Collier, *A short view of the immorality, and profaneness of the English stage together with a sense of antiquity upon this argument*, "The Immodesty of the Stage," pg. 9-10

> "To represent them [women] without this Quality [modesty], is to make Monsters of them, and throw them out of their Kind. *Euripides,* who was no negligent Observer of Humane Nature, is always careful of this Deco|rum. Thus *Phaedra* when possess'd with an infamous Passion, takes all imaginable pains to conceal it. She is as regular and reserv'd in her Language as the most virtuous Matron. 'Tis true, the force of Shame and Desire; The Scandal of Satisfying, and the difficulty of parting with her Inclinations, disorder her to Distraction. However, her Frensy is not Lewd; She keeps her

Though real madwomen may indeed lose their reason and their modesty, in real life they are not allowed to parade themselves without company.

Looking beyond what Collier thought of madness on the stage, it's clear what he thought of madness off it. Liberty for the mad on stage sets a bad precedent for what should be done in real life; the mad should be removed from general society. In all this, we can see a trend towards the commodification of the insane: rather it be the truthfully mad begging in the streets or locked up and looked upon in Bethlem, or acted out on stage, madness was both omnipresent and an endless source of entertainment.

The 1700s

The hospitalization of the mad continued to increase throughout the eighteenth century. In 1676, Bethlem Hospital had a hundred and fifty beds—by 1720, it was enlarged to accommodate increased admissions.[56] Admission was not indiscriminate. The same year of the expansion, John Stype published *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster*, where he noted that "those are judged the fittest Objects for this Hospital [Bethlem] that are raving and furious and [...] likely to do mischief to themselves or others," specifically excluding admitees that "are only Melancholik [...] or Ideots."[57] Despite this selection process, by the 1780s there were two hundred patients on the waiting list.[58]

Modesty even after She has lost her Wits. Had *Shakespear* secur'd this point for his young Virgin *Ophelia,* the *Play* had been better contriv'd. Since he was resolv'd to drown the Lady like a Kitten, he should have set her a swimming a little sooner. To keep her alive only to sully her Reputation, and discover the Rankness of her Breath, was very Cruel. But it may be said the Freedoms of Distraction go for nothing, a Feavour has no Faults, and a Man *non Compos,* may kill without Murther. It may be so: But then such People ought to be kept in dark Rooms and without Company. To shew them, or let them loose, is somewhat unreasonable. But after all, the Modern *Stage* seems to depend upon this Expedient. Women are sometimes represented *Silly,* and sometimes *Mad,* to enlarge their Li|berty, and screen their Impudence from Censure: This Tolitick Contrivance we have in *Marcella, Hoyden,* and Miss *Prue.*"

[56] Torrey & Miller, *The Invisible Plague,* pg. 24

[57] *Ibid*. pg. 24

[58] *Ibid*. pg. 25

Touring Bethlem was still a popular London diversion. Pierre-Jean Grosley, a popular French travel writer, devoted a chapter to his 1772 *Londres* to his trip to Bethlem, where he has pleasant tea with "the daughter of a French refugee"[59] whose particular madness remains a mystery to Grosley, then visits a different "ward of Bedlam," during which he observes

> a row of large cells, in each of which was a poor unfortunate wretch, chained down in bed. Whist I was going round, one of the madmen, having disengaged himself from his chains, leaped stark naked upon the back of the person that accompanied me, who was the keeper of the ward. The keep seized him by the arms, and carried him back to his cell, without giving him time to change his attitude.[60]

Here, we see the emergence of an interesting duality: visible and invisible insanity. As previously mentioned, madness was once a matter of physicality. The mad were easily identifiable through mad antics, such as the ones displayed by the one of the "poor unfortunate wretch[s]" in the second ward Grosley visits. The French refugee's daughter, however, is another matter entirely: she converses quite politely and intelligently with Grosley, madness unseen and only known because of their location's context. This designation of the invisible mad would only increase in the following centuries.

Confinement was by no means universal, especially for well-off families, and the continued private, familial care of the mad is perhaps best exemplified by the Lamb family. In 1775, twenty year old Charles Lamb had a manic episode, resulting in six-weeks of hospitalization at a private madhouse. Later, he would describe his grandiose delusions to his

[59] Pierre-Jean Grosley & Thomas Nugent, *A Tour to London; or, New Observations on England, and Its Inhabitants*, pg. 243
[60] Grosley & Nugent, *A Tour to London*, pg. 244

former schoolmate and close friend, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, saying "But mad I was—and many a vagary my imagination played with me, enough to make a volume if all told…For while it lasted I had many many hours of pure happiness. Dream not, Coleridge, of having tasted all the grandeur and wildness of Fancy, till you have gone mad. All now seems to me vapid; comparatively so."[61]

Eight months later, in 1796, Charles's sister, Mary Lamb, killed their invalid mother with a carving knife in a mad fit. But Mary was not to be put to trial, nor secluded in a madhouse; rather, Charles petitioned the court, and on a coroner's warrant,[62] Mary was released from the madhouse under Charles's guardianship. Charles continued to care for Mary for the rest of his life, despite Mary's "continuing, and increasingly prolonged, episodes of violent mania followed by 'a succeeding dreadful depression,' during which she required rehospitalization."[63] Between episodes, Mary was able to function quite normally, and in 1807, she and Charles published the children's book *Tales Founded on the Plays of Shakespeare*, with Mary writing the comedies, and Charles the tragedies.[64]

The Lamb story tells us several things. It shows a continued use of familial care, though augmented with hospitalization. It shows the successful use of the *non compos menti* defense, or insanity plea. And it shows a certain romanticization of mental illness in Charles Lamb's description of "all the grandeur and wildness of Fancy."

The eighteenth century marks an increasing trend in interested doctors attempting to mark causes, classifications, and cures of insanity. In 1733, George Cheyne published *The English*

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[61] Torrey & Miller, *The Invisible Plague*, pg. 34
[62] Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, pg. 11
[63] Torrey & Miller, *The Invisible Plague*, pg. 34
[64] *Ibid*. pg. 34

Malady, in which he described the causes of "chronical distempers" using a somewhat modified humoral theory, citing the quality of fluids within the body.[65] And in his 1782 *Observations on [...] Insanity*, Thomas Arnold explains that madness, insanity, and lunacy are "synonymous terms; and as conveying the complex idea of all those disorders [...] in which the faculties of the mind are very considerably, if not principally, or solely affected; —in which its imagination is disturbed, its affectations are perverted, and its judgement is depraved."[66] He further separates insanity into two kinds: melancholy, and mania/phrensy/fury. Melancholy is defined as "permanent delirium, without fury, or fever, in which the mind is dejected, and timorous, and usually employed about one object" and "mania is a permanent delirium, with fury and audacity, but without fever," and phrensy as mania with fever.[67]

These works are just a small selection of the works on madness published in English during the eighteenth century. As John Haslam notes in his introduction to his 1798 *Observations on Insanity*, not to be confused with Arnold's, "it has been somewhere observed, that in our own country [England] more books on Insanity have been published than in any other."[68] England was rife with observations on insanity. Throughout Europe, nervous disorders were seen as a distinctly English problem. Cheyne introduces his aforementioned *An English Malady* with an explanation that "the title I have chosen for this Treatise, is a Reproach universally thrown on this Island by Foreigners, and all our Neighbors on the Continent, by

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[65]George Cheyne, M.D., *The English Malady: or, a Treatise of Nervous Diseases of all Kinds, as Spleen, Vapours, Lowness of Spirits, Hypochondriacal and Hysterical Distempers*, &c, pg. 6-7

> "1st. A Glewiness, Sizness, Viscidity, or Grossness in the Fluids
> 2*ndly*, Some Sharpness or corrosive Quality in the Fluids
> 3*dly*, A too great Laxity or Want of due Tone, Elasticity and Force in the *Fibres* in general, or the Nerves in particular."

[66] Thomas Arnold, M.D., *Observations on the Nature, Kinds, Causes, and Prevention of Insanity, Lunacy, or Madness* pg. 14

[67] Arnold, *Observations on [...] Insanity*, pg. 30

[68] John Haslam, *Observations on Insanity: with Practical Remarks on the Disease, and a Account of the Morbid Appearances on Dissection*, pg. viii

> "It has been somewhat observed, that in our country more books on Insanity have been published than in any other; and, if the remark be just, it is certainly discouraging to him who proposed to add to their number."

whom nervous Distempers, Spleen, Vapours, and Lowness of Spirits, are in Derision, called the English malady."[69] Shakespeare himself acknowledged the old joke in Hamlet:

> *Hamlet*: Ay, marry, why was he [Hamlet] sent into England?
> *First Clown*: Why, because he was mad: he shall recover his wits there; or, if he do not, it's no great matter there.
> *Hamlet*: Why?
> *First Clown*: 'Twill, a not be seen in him there; there the men are as mad as he[70]

Theatre-goers in the 1700s may not have appreciated the joke. There was not much objection in England to the accusation; insanity was becoming a public health crisis.

In 1735, a letter to the Royal College of Physicians noted "our nation has been observed by foreigners to abound in *maniacs*, more than any other upon the face of the earth."[71] As late as 1782, Arnorld's *Observations on [...] Insanity* contained a section entitled "Whether Insanity Prevails More in England Than in Other Countries." Grosley was effusive on the melancholic character of the English, with at least four sections of *Londres* dedicated to English melancholy. [72] Grosley was so firm on this that, when arriving from France, he writes that he first "perceived that I was no longer in France" when he saw a "fat man [...] with an expression of melancholy in his face, which in France is to be seen only in the countenance of those who had just buried their dearest friend."[73]

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[69] Cheyne, *The English Malady*, pg. i
[70] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* V.1.154-160
[71] Torrey & Miller, *The Invisible Plague*, pg. 35
[72] Grosley & Nugent, *A Tour to London; or, New Observations on England, and Its Inhabitants,* pg. xi-xii
"The English Melancholy, its Causes, Effects, and Remedies," "National Pride, how far Melancholy may be productive of it; Effects of this Pride with regard to England," "Suicide," and "Madmen and Lunatics." All of this is nestled among other topics such as "Meat," "Cleanliness," "Horse Races," and "[The People:] Their Antipathy to the French."
[73] *Ibid*. pg. 14

In the minds of the French, at least, some part of this national melancholy was due to the people's choice in entertainment. Grosley theorized that "the theatrical exhibitions of the English equally contribute to the feed, or rather increase the melancholy," calling *Macbeth, Richard III*, and *King Lear* plays where "whatever the most barbarous cruelty, or the most refined wickedness can possibly conceive, is presented to the view."[74] This sentiment echoes Voltaire, who in 1748, called *Hamlet* "a vulgar and barbarous drama, which would not be tolerated by the vilest populace of France, or Italy."[75] While the French are perhaps not the most unbiased judges of English dramaturgy, this does show a certain tendency to characterize theatre as both a cause and a representation of national mood.

Some part of evolving English views on madness, in both its prevalence and people's fascination with it, was no doubt predicated by the well-known insanity of King George III, who ruled England from 1760 to 1820. By all accounts a fairly popular king late in his reign,[76] he suffered a mental collapse around the year 1788-89. Daily reports by the king's physicians were reprinted in newspapers,[77] and the topic was very much on the mind of the average Englishman. The *Morning Chronicle* reported that "among other objects peculiarly affected by the stage of his Majesty's indisposition, is the theatre which is prevented by a laudable delicacy from performing

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[74] *Ibid.* pg. 177

> "The theatrical exhibitions of the English equally contribute to feed, or rather increase the national melancholy. [...] At the representation of Macbeth, Richard the Third, King Lear, and other pieces of Shakespeare, which I happened to be a spectator of, whatever the most barbarous cruelty, or the most refined wickedness can possibly conceive, is presented to the view. What these pieces want in point of reguliary, is abundantly compensated by the choice of incidents, of a nature most affecting, and most capable of harrowing up the foul."

[75] John Morley, & Edmundo González-Blanco. *Voltaire*, "Literature." pg. 124

> "A vulgar and barbarous drama, which would not be tolerated by the vilest populace of France, or Italy. Hamlet becomes crazy in the second act, and his mistress becomes crazy in the third; the prince slays the father of his mistress under the pretence of killing a rat, and the heroine throws herself into the river, a grave is dug on stage, and the grave-diggers talk quodlibets worthy of themselves, while holding skulls in their hands; Hamlet responds to their nasty vulgarities in silliness no less disgusting."

[76] Linda Colley, *The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation 1760-1820*, pg. 102

[77] Dana Rovang, *When reason reigns: madness, passion and sovereignty in late 18th-century England*, pg. 24

King Lear, *The Regent*, and several other dramas, on account of their striking applicability to the present juncture of affairs."[78]

CONCLUSION

Popular and medical conceptualization of madness has changed greatly over the years. But, at least through the 1700s, a few things remained the same. Madness was still characterized by obvious symptoms of outward behavior: though mad doctors existed, it did not take a professional to recognize someone has gone mad. And "gone mad" is literal—though not always, for many, madness was a temporary aberration, not an absolute state of being. Finally, we can see the profound influence the concept of madness had on the culture. But as we venture into the 1800s, only this last point would truly remain the same.

[78] Torrey & Miller, *The Invisible Plague*, pg. 41

Chapter Two: *Mad let us grant him*

❦

> *Polonius*: Madam, I swear I use no art at all.
> That he is mad, 'tis true: 'tis true 'tis pity;
> And pity 'tis 'tis true: a foolish figure;
> But farewell it, for I will use no art.
> Mad let us grant him, then: and no remains
> That we find out the cause of this effect,
> Or rather say, the cause of this defect,
> For the effect defective comes by cause;
> Thus it remains, and the remainder thus.[79]

It's amusing that, while Shakespeare would have had no way of predicting the centuries of heated discourse *Hamlet* would bring about, he nevertheless gave us a character who spends a decent proportion of *Hamlet*'s runtime searching for the cause of Hamlet's madness. As Dover Wilson notes, "theories about Hamlet did not begin with Goethe and Coleridge, but with Claudius and Polonius."[80] Polonius positions himself as the locus around which Hamlet's madness most visibly manifests. Audiences first hear of Hamlet putting his "antic disposition" plan into action when Ophelia runs to her father in distress and tells him about Hamlet bursting "pale as his shirt; his knees knocking each other"[81] into her room. Hamlet bounces his cleverest mad lines off a prying Polonius. It's Polonius who brings a potential cause—Ophelia's rejection—of Hamlet's madness to Gertrude and Claudius. And it's Polonius who first pays the

[79] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* II.2.104-112
[80] Dover Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet*, pg. 20
[81] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* II.1.81

dearest price for Hamlet's antics: ignobly killed, apparently in error, while hiding behind a curtain in the Queen's bedroom, and his body subsequently dragged around the castle.

It takes until the mid-1800s for Polonius' spiritual successors to return. The nineteenth century marks a dramatic turn in attitudes towards mental illness. The study of madness and insanity moved from the qualitative to the quantitative. Outward expressions of madness were no longer enough to qualify one as mad, and apparent normalcy was no exemption from suspicion. New scientific advancements made it possible for doctors to do more than just list symptoms, opening new pathways into the metrics of disease. At the same time, advocates were campaigning for more humane treatment of the confined insane.

Hand-in-hand with this historical shift is a marked changed in psychology's[82] relationship with Shakespeare, and with *Hamlet*. In the seventeenth and sixteenth centuries, Shakespeare and mental illness mostly existed tangentially to each other: Shakespeare was a popular playwright, *Hamlet* a popular play, and madness a popular social issue. Insomuch as they were connected, it was a small step above coincidental. But in the nineteenth century, psychologists stepped past using Shakespeare to *illustrate* their theories, and went to using Shakespeare to *prove* them. Shakespeare has long been considered a master of representing the human character, and Hamlet his masterpiece.

In tandem, literary critic's relationship with *Hamlet* began to change. Instead of focusing on Shakespeare's choices as a playright, or the plot of *Hamlet*, they instead began to examine Hamlet's choices as a character, and eventually, Hamlet's choices as a man. Hamlet became a man of philosophy, of great internal depth, a character with a depth of emotion so great it was almost unbearable to watch him reduced to the stage. In short, critics began to look at his psyche.

[82] And in the 1800s, "psychology" was becoming the correct term

This chapter is divided into two parts: first, how psychologists used *Hamlet*, then how critics used psychology on Hamlet. The first, *With th' incorporal air do hold discourse*, will track how at psychology's naissance, psychologists looked back towards Shakespeare both as a source of cultural authority, and for his perceived insights into the human psyche, through the history of three different psychological disciplines: phrenology, moral treatment, and Freud. The second, *A document in madness*, will track the changes in critics' views of Hamlet, touching on the 1600s and 1700s to establish a baseline, then focusing on the Romantic era, the Romantics' successors, and the first psychoanalytical criticisms. Then, I will discuss the relationship between these two trends.

WITH TH' INCORPORAL AIR DO HOLD DISCOURSE[83]

Phrenology

One of the most significant psychological movements in the 1800s was phrenology, which—despite being discredited by most scientists in the day—dominated popular opinion. Called "bumpology" by its many detractors, phrenology's earliest practitioners preferred the German term *schädellehre*, or "the doctrine of the skull,"[84] coined by the theory's originator, Franz Joseph Gall.[85] Gall's work in post-mortem dissections in between visitors to the Narrenturm [Fool's Tower] in Vienna pushed him towards the development of a theory of innate mental faculties.[86] Gall hypothesized that these faculties were housed in discrete 'organs' (a

[83] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* III.2.135
[84] Bryan Adams Hampton, "'I Knew Him, Horatio': Shakespeare's Beliefs, Early Textual Editing, and Nineteenth-Century Phrenology, pg. 7
[85] John Van Wyhe, "The Authority of Human Nature: The 'Schädellehre' of Franz Joseph Gall." *The British Journal for the History of Science*, pg. 17
[86] *Ibid.,* pg. 20

common term in Vienna for "hypothetical brain modules"), each associated with a certain trait.[87] These organs determined the shape of the brain, and since brain shape determined skull shape, the size and qualities of these organs could be outwardly divinated by a skilled phrenologist.[88] The cerebral organs were fairly simple in themselves: a well-developed organ of Benevolence indicated an individual inclined towards benevolence; a well-developed Murder organ indicated a potential murderer.[89]

Phrenology obviously held a lot of potential in aiding research towards the recognition of insanity, as well as the discovery of causes and, eventually, cures. H.A. Buttolph described how phrenology could be used in the diagnosis of insanity in *The Phrenological Journal of Science and Health*, especially in regards to court cases, remarking on how "mental derangement" sometimes "arises from very slight diseases of the brain," diseases that "may primarily affect the organs of the feelings, religious, social or animal, poisoning their fountains, exciting, depressing or perverting them," eventually resulting in "some sad and unlooked for calamity."[90] Cures were

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[87] *Ibid*. pg. 22-23

[88] H. A. Buttolph, "The Relation Between Phrenology and Insanity," *The Phrenological Journal of Science and Health*, pg. 223

> "The science teaches that the mind is a perfect whole, but made up of many parts of faculties; that these faculties are primitive, peculiar powers; that they differ in strength, relative and absolute, in different persons, and finally, that they depend upon the brain for their manifestation. Phrenology, then, is the science of the healthy functions of the brain, or the physiology of that organ."

[89] The number and function of Gall's organs differed throughout the years, but Gall's original 27 were: impulse to propagation, parental love, fidelity, valour/self-defense, murder/carnivorousness, sense of cunning, larceny/sense of property, pride/arrogance/love of authority, ambition and vanity, circumspection, aptness to recieve an education, sense of locality, recollection of persons, faculty for words/verbal memory, faculty of language, disposition for colouring and the delighting in colours, sense for sounds/musical talent, arthmetic/counting/time, mechanical skill, comparative perspicuity/sagacity, metaphysical perspicuity, wit/causality/sense of inference, poetic talent, good-nature/compassion/moral sense, mimic, theosophy/sense of God and religion, and perserverance/firmness.

[90] Buttolph., "The Relation Between Phrenology and Insanity," pg. 224-225

> "Here, again, phrenology comes to our aid, and by revealing a correct system of mental philosophy, greatly assists us in forming correct views of the conduct and motives of others, both in health and disease. When mental derangement results from obvious and well-known causes, and is exhibited by a sudden and striking change in the character and conduct of the individual, little difficulty is experienced in its diagnosis. At times, however, it arises from very slight diseases of the brain, quite partial in extent, and whether induced by physical, mental or moral causes, separately or combined. The departure from the healthy mental standard of the individual consisted, in these causes, in a slightly increased or lessened acuteness of the intellect, perversion of the feelings or occasional faint delusions in regard to external objects and relations, coupled with a disturbed state of the moral, social or animal feelings, inducing timidity, suspicions, jealousy, revenge, etc., according to the predominant feelings of the individual.
>
> The true diagnosis is often difficult, and if, as frequently occurs, the question of the responsibility of the subject for the commission of crime is raised, its correct settlement becomes a matter of great importance, involving, as it may, the liberty, civil rights or even the life of the individual. Masked or obscure disease of this kind often exists for months and years unsuspected by friends of the parties, or by other persons, until some sudden though perhaps long mediated act of

also possible: Bernard Hollander prefaced a meeting with the note that "the subject he had chosen to speak upon was not a very pleasant one, because insanity was the most dreaded of all diseases. He had chosen it because of its great importance and significance to Phrenologists. Without a knowledge of the localization of the mental functions of the brain insanity could neither be understood nor treated successfully."[91] Hollander goes on to cite an example of a sixteen year old boy whose wild behavior landed in court. After being brought into the case, Hollander suggested "the removal of a strip of bone from the center line of the head down the ears."[92] When this was performed, an old brain hemorrhage was revealed, and subsequently healed. Afterwards, the boy's "vicious propensities" vanished, though he showed "somewhat abnormal moral qualities."[93]

On the opposite side of the coin, phrenologists also sought to confirm their theories by looking not just for madness, but for the cranial architecture of genius. Shakespeare and his undisputed intellect was an often aimed at target. 1864 saw the publication of E.T. Craig's *Shakespeare's Portraits Phrenologically Considered*; 1875 saw it republished. Craig approves of the famous Droeshout portrait, with its high frontal lobe and prominent eyes, and dismisses the Stratford bust, which he claimed showed "[d]estructiveness, secretiveness, alimentiveness [appetite or hunger], and acquisitiveness [desire for accumulation] are all large; while ideality

suicide or of homicide, reveals the true state. In other instances, disease may primarily affect the organs of the feelings, religious, social or animal, poisoning their fountains, exciting, depressing or perverting them from their proper office and ministry in the mental group, and, in the end, resulting, as in the former instance, in some sad and unlooked for calamity."

[91] Bernard Hollander, M.D. "Phrenology and Insanity." *The Phrenological Journal and Science of Health*, Vol. 121, Iss. 7. July 1908. pg. 233

[92] *Ibid*. pg. 233

[93] *Ibid*. pg. 233

and wit are scarcely indicated."[94] And William Walton published an article in *The Phrenological Journal and Science of Health*, where it was discovered that

> The organ of Individuality in Shakespeare was largely developed [...] Language was wonderfully large and active, and was manifested not merely in acquiring foreign tongues, but in creating a just and glowing medium of his own [...] Comparison, one of his largest intellectual organs, must have been exceedingly active, and, blended with his great perception, gave accurate powers of analogy [...] Eventuality stored his mind with the incidents of all nations, ancient and modern, and supplied the rich resources of his historical plays [...] Veneration, so largely developed in our author, and acting in harmony with his lofty intellect and towering Benevolence, delights us by its beautiful and appropriate manifestation.[95]

presumably based on the Kesselstadt Death Mask. Though Walton acknowledges that he can not see all parts of the brain, he notes that "the actual size of other portions of the brain we must depend upon the relation which generally exists between one portion of the cranium and another, and the appropriate manifestations furnished by his writings," giving examples of this mathematics with such lines as "We must not omit the poet's large Cautiousness and Wonder, which add so much thrilling interest to the dagger scene of Macbeth."[96]

Not all phrenologists were content to stick to the safety of paintings, death masks, and statues. Though their efforts were widely condemned, there were several calls to exhume Shakespeare's bones—specifically, his skull—purportedly for "portraiture," though they were always published by phrenologists or in phrenological journals. In 1883, *Shakespeare's Bones: The Proposal to Disinter Them, Considered in Relation to Their Possible Bearing on His*

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[94] E.T. Craig, "Shakespeare's Portraits Phrenologically Considered," as quoted in Bryan Adams Hampton, "'I Knew Him, Horatio': Shakespeare's Beliefs, Early Textual Editing, and Nineteenth-Century Phrenology, pg. 10
[95] William Walton & Charlotte Fowler Wells, "Sketches of Phrenological Biography," *The Phrenological Journal and Science of Health,* pg. 319
[96] *Ibid.,* pg. 319

Portraiture was published by C. M. Ingleby, a proponent of phrenology, who intended "to find such evidence as time may not have wholly destroyed, of his personal appearance, including the size and shape of his head."[97]

Not all calls to disinter Shakespeare bothered to claim portraiture. An anonymous article published in Cincinnati's *Commercial Gazette* and reprinted by Inglby argued that that Shakespeare's skull should be honored in the Royal College of Surgeons, "as the apex of the climbing series of skeletons, from the microscopic to the divine."[98] And not even all calls centered around Shakespeare's genius: in an article published in *The Phrenological Magazine*, John George Speed accuses "How many of those who have expended volumes of print in discussing whether Hamlet was mad might be discussing whether Shakespeare was not mad himself if they could [...]!"[99]

The phrenological movement towards Shakespeare was mostly in search of a biological 'look,' whether it be genius or madness, but it was no doubt in part inspired by *Hamlet*. William John Birch, in his 1848 *An Inquiry into the Philosophy and Religion of Shakespeare,* notes that Hamlet's musings on Yorick's skull are phrenologically-inclined;[100] how else, the audience must wonder, was the gravedigger able to recognize the skull of poor Yorick out of a graveyard full of (apparently not) identical skulls? And how else was Hamlet supposed to look into empty orbits and recognize a fellow of infinite jest?

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[97] Clement Mansfield Ingleby, *Shakespeare's Bones: The Proposal to Disinter Them, Considered in Relation to Their Possible Bearing on His Portraiture*, pg.2
[98] Ingleby, *Shakespeare's Bones,* as quoted in Hampton, "'I Knew Him, Horatio': Shakespeare's Beliefs, Early Textual Editing, and Nineteenth-Century Phrenology, pg. 10
[99] John George Speed, *The Education of Man*, "The Phrenological Magazine," pg. 328
[100] Hampton, "'I Knew Him, Horatio': Shakespeare's Beliefs, Early Textual Editing, and Nineteenth-Century Phrenology," pg. 7
It feels important to note that Birch used Hamlet as a stand-in for Shakespeare himself.

Yorick's role in phrenology was not always theoretical. The prominent Shakespearean actor George Frederick Cooke is said to have had an unexpected post-mortem role as Yorick. The memoirs of John Doran say that

> A theatrical benefit had been announced at the Park, and "Hamlet" the play. A subordinant [*sic*] of the theatre at a late hour hurried to my office, for a skull. I was compelled to loan the head of my old friend, George Frederick Cooke. "Alas, poor Yorick!" It was returned in the morning; but on the ensuing evening, at a meeting of the Cooper Club, the circumstance becoming known to several members, and a general desire being expressed to investigate, phrenologically, the head of the great tragedian, the article was again released from its privacy, when Daniel Webster, Henry Wheaton, and many others who enriched the meeting of that night, applied the principles of craniological science to the interesting specimen before them [...] Cooke enacted a great part that night.[101]

The results found:

> The head was pronounced capacious, the function of animality amply developed; the height of the forehead ordinary; the space between the orbits of unusual breadth, giving proofs of strong perceptive powers; the transverse basilar portion of the skull of corresponding width. Such was the phrenology of Cook. This scientific exploration added to the variety and gratification of that memorable evening.[102]

Or in other words: they found exactly what they expected. Phrenology was a self-congratulatory pseudo-science, whose practitioners decided on a conclusion and then sought evidence to back it up—Shakespeare's divinity in English literature made him too prime a target for phrenologists to resist.

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[101] John Doran, *"Their Majestie's Servants": Annals of the English Stage from Betterton to Edmun Kean*, as quoted in Elizabeth Williamson, "Yorick's Afterlives: Skull Properties in Performance," pg. 7-8

[102] John Doran, *"Their Majestie's Servants": Annals of the English Stage from Betterton to Edmun Kean*, as quoted in Paul Menzer, *Anecdotal Shakespeare: A New History,* pg. 51

Moral Treatment & Asylum Reform

While phrenologists sought visible markers of madness, a major revolution was happening in 19th century asylums, especially in America. Moral treatment, which arose soon after European asylums began to "reorganiz[e] themselves according to the more individual rights-oriented philosophies of the Enlightenment,"[103] advocated for the humane treatment of the mentally ill, and emphasized character and spiritual development as a cure for insanity,[104] ideally modeled in the characters of the doctors, nurses, and all else allowed to interact with the patients. This was a major change from the madhouses of old: as one contemporary magazine notes while praising moral treatment, "No idea more erroneous was ever entertained, than that the mass of persons whose minds are disordered cannot appreciate the conveniences and comforts of civilized domestic life. Humanity never wandered more widely from her proper path than when she placed the man bereft of reason upon a level with the felon."[105]

Where phrenologists considered the physical aspects of Shakespeare in their quest for modelling genius, asylum superintendents saw in Shakespeare a man whose unique insights into the functioning of the human mind were timeless, unparalleled, and *accurate*. Some of the most renowned and influential asylum superintendents of the day lauded Shakespeare and his visionary use of the moral treatment, including Amariah Brigham, the superintendent of the New York State Lunatic Asylum and the first editor of the *American Journal of Insanity* (*AJI*); A. O. Kellogg, Brigham's former assistant and superintendent of the Port Hope Asylum; and Isaac

[103] Beth Haller, "Moral Treatment," *Encyclopedia of American Disability History*
[104] Abraham S. Luchins, "Moral Treatment in Asylums and General Hospitals in 19th-Century America," *Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 123, Iss. 6, pg. 585
[105] "Moral Treatment: Bloomingdale Asylum—Method of the Egyptians—Opinion of Drs. Cullen and Burns—Kindness of the Insane toward children—Instance in Brattleboro' Institution," *Prisoner's Friend: A Monthly Magazine Dedicated to Criminal Reform, Philosophy, Science, Literature, and Art*, Vol. 1 Iss.12, pg. 46

Ray, superintendent of the Maine Insane Asylum and then later the Butler Hospital. "There is scarcely a form of mental disorder," wrote Brigham, that Shakespeare "has not alluded to, and pointed out the causes and method of treatment."[106] After extensive readings of Shakespeare, Brigham wrote five general Shakespearean doctrines of insanity:

1. That a well-formed brain, a good shaped head, is essential to a good mind.
2. That insanity is a disease of the brain.
3. That there is a general and partial insanity.
4. That it is a disease which can be cured by medical means.
5. That the causes are various, the most common of which he has particularly noted. [107]

These five rules just so happen to be foundational theories in the moral treatment movement.

Over and over again, these asylum superintendents pointed back towards Shakespeare and his cultural authority as a master of representing human nature to justify their theories; this, despite the fact that where Shakespeare's characters seek medical treatment, doctors are helpless—the physician in *King Lear* advises Cordelia to let Lear repose with the "foster-nurse of nature"[108] and in *Macbeth*, after the physician confesses that in the case of Lady Macbeth, he can not "minister to a mind diseas'd," Macbeth curses "throw physic to the dogs"[109]—and one only needs to look towards *Much Ado About Nothing* to claim that Shakespeare would not have approved of the humanitarian treatment of the insane when Leonato talks of those who "would give preceptial med'cine to rage fetter strong madness in a silken thread."[110]

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[106] Reiss, "Bardolatry in Bedlam: Shakespeare, Psychiatry, and Cultural Authority in Nineteenth-Century America,". pg. 769
[107] Brigham, "Insanity," pg. 38, as quoted in *Ibid.* pg. 769
[108] Shakespeare, *King Lear* IV.4.12 as quoted in *Ibid.* pg. 776
[109] Shakespeare, *Macbeth* V.3.49 as quoted in *Ibid.* pg. 776
[110] Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing* V.1.24-25, as quoted in *Ibid.* pg. 776

Looking beyond the scope of relatively narrow fields—phrenology and moral treatment— Shakespeare was a frequent referent in the wider field of psychology. In 1812, the American physician Benjamin Rush published *Medical Inquiries and Observations, upon Diseases of the Mind*, where he apologizes for his liberal use of Shakespeare to describe diseases.[111] In his 1822 textbook, the British doctor John Mason Good framed his discussion of melancholia attonita[112] around Hamlet.[113] Henry Maudsley used Shakespeare to illustrate his ideas on multiple occasions; Hamlet, for example, was suffering from "constitutional indisposition."[114] Some uses even took a turn from the textbook into the practical. Isaac Ray told jurists to look at Shakespeare to understand "issues of the criminal culpability of the insane;" the sentiment is echoed by the editor of the *Opal*, the patient-run literary journal of the New York State Lunatic Asylum, who wrote that a judge had written him to ask for an appropriate definition of insanity—the editor directs the judge towards *Hamlet*.[115] And in 1828, London physician Sir Henry Halford created a test of insanity that was specifically derived from Shakespeare, specifically the bedroom scene in Hamlet, where Hamlet defends his wild speech by saying

> *Hamlet*: [...] bring me to the test,
> And I the matter will reword, —which madness
> Would gambol from.[116]

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[111] Benjamin Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations, Upon the Diseases of the Mind,* pg. 160, as quoted in *Ibid.* pg. 772
[112] A state of schizophrenia characterized by immobility
[113] John Mason Good, as quoted in George Farren, *Essays on the Varieties of Mania, Exhibited by the Characters of Hamlet, Ophelia, Lear, and Edgar,* pg. 28, as quoted in *Ibid.* pg. 772
[114] *Ibid.* pg. 774
[115] *Ibid.* pg. 787
[116] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* III.4.164-165

When a man "in a state of mental derangement" but appeared to be having a moment of lucidity asked Halford to revise his will, Halford asked his patient to reword it. When the man got many of the names and figures, or "gamboled" from the matter, the new will was declared invalid.[117] Halford's test became a common, though controversial, one in the medical jurisprudence of insanity.

Freud

As we exit the nineteenth century, it would be remiss of me not to mention Sigmund Freud, whose psychoanalytic writings fundamentally changed the way we view the human mind and causes of mental distress. Fundamentally, Freudian theories rely on the powerful effect of the unconscious mind. And though the connection is not nearly as integral in Freud's own writings, *Hamlet* and Freud are so intertwined in modern culture that it's rare to find mention of Freud without a callback to *Hamlet*, or vice versa. Though hopefully, previous discussion of how common it was to use Shakespeare as an example and as evidence of a theory makes it clear that Freud was less than original in his choice.

Freud's theories of psychoanalysis revolved around the idea of the conscious and unconscious. If one had thoughts that the conscious mind finds unacceptable, the mind naturally 'represses' it into the unconscious. But conflicts in the unconscious could sometimes surface and cause problems with the consciou. This constant internal war within our own minds was, to Freud, the source of all emotional turmoil. Since the unconscious was generally inaccessible, it was difficult for a patient to resolve conflicts on their own. However, it was possible for the

[117] Reiss, "Bardolatry in Bedlam: Shakespeare, Psychiatry, and Cultural Authority in Nineteenth-Century America." pg. 778

unconscious to indirectly influence the conscious via personal preferences, "the frames of reference in which we tend to understand things, and the symbols we are drawn to create."[118]

This is where Freud's psychoanalytic psychotherapy, or psychoanalysis, came in. A patient would lie on a couch and talk with a psychoanalyst trained in Freudian theory to help uncover truths about their unconscious desires. It was the psychoanalyst's job to "ac[t] as mediator, trying to allow unspoken thoughts or unbearable feelings to come to light"[119] and skillfully interpret the unconscious desires hidden beneath conscious ones.

Though Freud uses *Hamlet* several times in his writings, the most famous instance is in his 1891 book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, where he uses Hamlet as an example of a repressed Oedipus Complex—the son's repressed desire to have sex with his mother, and kill his father.But while phrenologists and asylum superintentendents saw any psychology in *Hamlet* as Shakespeare's own insights into the subject, Freud claimed that the appearance of an Oedipus Complex in *Hamlet* was proof that *Hamlet* "is rooted in the same soil as *Oedipus Rex*. But the whole difference in the psychic life of the two widely separated periods of of civilization, and the progress, during the course of time, of repression in the emotional life of humanity, is manifested in the different treatment of the same material."[120] In other words, since the Oedipus Complex was such fundamental part of the human psyche, and always had been, it unconscious was manifested in literature across centuries. But while Oedipus was able to realize his complex in actuality, Hamlet repressed his; as Freud put it, "I have here translated into consciousness what had to remain unconscious in the mind of the hero; if anyone wishes to call Hamlet an [sic]

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[118] Catherine Collin, Nigel Benson, Joannah Ginsburg, Voula Grand, Merrin Lazyan, & Marcus Weeks, *The Psychology Book*, pg. 96
[119] *Ibid.,* pg. 97
[120] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, pg. 52

hysterical subject I cannot but admit that this is the deduction to be drawn from my interpretation."[121]

Unlike the psychologists before him, however, Freud did not claim Shakespeare, as a master of human nature, had done this purposefully. Instead, *Hamlet* was a manifestation of Shakespeare's own repressed Oedipus Complex. Freud claims that *Hamlet* was written shortly after the death of Shakespeare's own father, leading to a revival "of his own childish feelings in respect of his father." Moreover, Shakespeare had a son who died in childhood named *Hamnet*, also unintentionally leading to a theme of childlessness in *Hamlet*, as well as *Macbeth*. In this way, "just as all neurotic symptoms, like dreams themselves, are capable of hyper-interpretation, and even require such hyper-interpretation before they become perfectly intelligible, so every genuine poetical creation must have proceeded from more than one motive, more than one impulse in the mind of the poet, and must admit of more than one interpretation. [With this theory] I have here attempted to interpret only the deepest stratum of impulses in the mind of the creative poet."[122]

Freud would later recant his explication of *Hamlet* and Shakespeare, after subscribing to the theory that Shakespeare did not exist, and was "very probably a pseudonym behind which a great unknown lies concealed. Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, a man who has been thought to be identified with the author of Shakespeare's works, lost a beloved and admired father while he was still a boy and completely repudiated his mother, who contracted a new marriage very soon after her husband's death,"[123] using his theories to identify a new Shakespeare.

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[121] *Ibid.,* pg. 52
[122] *Ibid.*, pg. 52
[123] W.F. Bynum * Michael Neve, "Hamlet on the Couch: Hamlet is a kind of touchstone by which to measure changing opinion—psychiatric and otherwise—about madness," *American Scientist,* Vol.74 No 4,pg. 395

A DOCUMENT IN MADNESS

This nineteenth-century historical shift was not limited to psychologists; as psychologists turned to literature, literary theorists turned to psychology. For the first century and a half after its debut, commentaries on *Hamlet* tended to be limited to its plot, its morals,[124] the quality of its speeches, and the effect on audiences.[125] However, beginning in the late 1700s, interest turned to what's often termed as "the problem of *Hamlet*," the problem being Hamlet's delay in taking his revenge. Through the 1800s and into the beginning of the 1900s, *Hamlet* commentary made a drastic change, from the critical emphasis on plot that dominated pre-1750s, to an emphasis on Hamlet's character, to an emphasis on Hamlet's mind that peaked with Freudian psychoanalytics.

Hamlet has been popular with audiences since its debut, and as such, has an easily traceable record of critic reponses, positive and negative; as George Farquhar write in 1702, "[Hamlet] is long the Darling of the English Audience, and like to continue with the same Applause, in Defiance of all the Criticism that were ever publid'd in Greek, and Latin."[126] Prior to the late 1700s, Hamlet was "generally interpreted as an unambivalent hero who simply needed to ascertain the facts and decide the best time and place at getting revenge."[127] John Upton,

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[124] Joseph Addison, *Spectator*, 1711, as quoted in Claude C.H. Williamson, *Readings on the Character of Hamlet*, pg. 5

> The appearance of the ghost in *Hamlet* is a master-piece in its kind and wrought up with all the circumstances that can create either attention or horror. The mind of the reader is wonderfully prepared for his reception by the discourses that precede it; his dumb behavior at his fiest entrance strikes the imagination very strong; but every time he enters he is still more terrifying. Who can read the speech with which young Hamlet accosts him without trembling?...

[125] George Garquhar, *Discourse upon Comedy*, as quoted in Claude C.H. Williamson, *Readings on the Character of Hamlet*, pg. 4

[126] Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics, Advice to an Author,* 1710 as quoted in Claude C.H. Williamson, *Readings on the Character of Hamlet*, pg. 5

> It may be properly said of this play [Hamlet], if I mistake not, that it has only ONE *Character or principal Part*. It contains no Adoration or Flattery of *the Sex*: no ranting at *the Gods*; no blustring *Heroism*: nor any thing of that curious mixture of the *Fierce* and *Tender*, which makes the hinge of modern Tragedy, and nicely varies it between the Points of *Love* and *Honour*.

[127] Bennett Simon, "*Hamlet* and the Trauma Doctors: An Essay at Interpretation," *American Imago* Vol.58 No.3, pg. 708

commenting in 1748, praises Hamlet for, of all things, his sense of timing: "Again, let us suppose the poet had a mind to inculcate this moral, that villany, tho' for a time successful, will meet its certain run...Thus Hamlet made an instrument of Providence to work the downfall of his uncle; and the punishment being completed, the play ends...Divine justice at length overtakes the tyrant in his securest hours, and the part is true to the cause of virtue…"[128] Hamlet's vacillation, if acknowledged or disliked, tends to be blamed on Shakespeare's own failings.[129] The so-called "problem of Hamlet" was, if a problem at all, a problem of *Hamlet*, not Hamlet. Gary Taylor suggests that "Hamlet was generally interpreted as an ambivalent hero who simply needed to ascertain the facts and decide the best time and place of getting revenge," citing a "cultural need for such a straightforward virtue in response to the turbulent history of the overthrow and restoration of the English monarchy."[130] Simon adds that "audiences sensitive to the consequences of deposing kings would empathize with Hamlet's need for caution in assessing his situation and deciding how to take action."[131]

> During the Restoration and through the mid-eighteenth century, Hamlet was generally interpreted as an unambivalent hero who simply needed to ascertain the facts and decide the best time and place of getting revenge. In [Gary] Taylor's view, there was a cultural need for such straightforward virtue in response to the turbulent history of the overthrow and restoration of the English monarchy. I would add that audiences sensitive to the consequences of deposing kings would empathise with Hamlet's need for caution in assessing his situation and deciding how to take action.

[128] John Upton, *Critical Observations on Shakespeare*, as quoted in Claude C.H. Williamson, *Readings on the Character of Hamlet*, pg. 8

Hamlet as an instrument of fate, rather than a player, seems a common theme in early 1700s opinion: Dr. Samuel Johnson (*Preface to Shakespeare*, 1765) writes: "Hamlet is, through the whole play, rather an instrument than an agent."

[129] Oliver Goldsmith, *Works,* 1765, as quoted in Claude C.H. Williamson, *Readings on the Character of Hamlet*, pg. 19

> The soliloquy in *Hamlet* which we have so often heard extolled in terms of admiration, is, in our opinion, a heap of absurdities, whether we consider the situation, the sentiment, the argument, or the poetry. Hamlet is informed by the ghost that his father was murdered and, therefore, he is tempted to murder himself, even after he had proised to take vengeance on the usurper and expressed the utmost eagerness to achieve this enterprise. It does not appear that he had the least reason to wish for death but every motive which may be supposed to influence the mind of a young prince concurred to render life desirable—revenge towards the usurper; love for the fair Ophelia; and the ambition of reigning. Besides, when he had the opportunity if [sic] dying without being accessory to his own death; when he had nothing to do but, in obedience to his uncle's command, to allow himself to be conveyed quietly to England, where he was sure of suffering death instead of amusing himself with mediations on mortality, he very wisely consulted the means of self-preservation, turned the tables upon his attendants and returned to Denmark.

[130] Bennett Simon, "*Hamlet* and the Trauma Doctors: An Essay at Interpretation," *American Imago* Vol.58 No.3, pg. 708-709

[131] *Ibid.,* pg. 709

It is not until the late 1700s where the *Hamlet* status-quo is challenged. Though Freud and Ernest Jones are often cited as the first to put Hamlet on the couch, they were far from the first to attempt to put forth theories on Hamlet's reason. Though the actual text seems to be lost, most histories trace the first psychological analysis of *Hamlet* back to 1778 and the writings of one Dr. Akenside, whom Furness's New Variorum edition of *Hamlet*[132] cites as the first physician "to assert that Hamlet's insanity is real."[133] On a meta-level, the problem of "the problem of *Hamlet*" is often placed on Goethe's famous "great action laid upon a soul unfit for the performance of it"[134] published in 1795. Robertson, however, points back to Charles Gildon (1665-1724) "at least"[135] though Gildon's problem, as mentioned before, seems to be with Shakespeare, rather than Hamlet.[136]

Regardless of its true origin, the *idea,* if not exactly the problem, of Hamlet's delay gained popularity in the 1800s mainly due to the efforts of William Hazlitt and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.[137] Though Hazlitt and Colerdige both found Hamlet's delay a matter of temperment, rather than a mental problem, their efforts in explaining Hamlet's rationale greatly contributed to

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[132] John Mackinnon Robertson, *"Hamlet" Once More*, pg. 53

[133] Reiss, "Bardolatry in Bedlam: Shakespeare, Psychiatry, and Cultural Authority in Nineteenth-Century America." pg. 772

[134] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, trans. Thomas Carlyle. *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship and Travels*. Book IV. Chap. XIV. pg. 216

> The time is out of joint: O cursed spite,
> That ever I was born to set it right!
>
> "In these words, I imagine, will be found the key to Hamlet's whole procedure. To me it is clear that Shakespeare meant, in the present case, to represent the effects of a great action laid upon a soul unfit for the performance of it. In this view the whole piece seems to me to be composed. There is an oak-tree planted in a costly jar, which should have borne only pleasant flowers in its bosom; the roots expand, the jar is shivered.
>
> A lovely, pure, noble and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve that forms a hero, sinks beneath a burden which it cannot bear and must not cast away. All duties are holy for him; the present is too hard. Impossibilities have been required of him; not in themselves impossibilities, but such for him. He winds, and turns, and torments himself; he advances and recoils, is ever put in mind, ever puts himself in mind; at last does all but lose his purpose from his thoughts; yet still without recovering his peace of mind."

[135] John Mackinnon Robertson, "The Aesthetic Problem," *The Problem of "Hamlet,"* pg. 12

[136] *Ibid.,* pg. 24

> Gildon in 1710 had charged on the play "abundance of errors in the conduct and design," insisting that "Shakespeare was master of this story," and therefore responsible for the plot. Hamner in 1730, in turn, pronounced that "our poet by keeping too close to the groundwork of his plot has fallen into an absurdity"; adding: "Had Hamlet gone naturally to work...there would have been and end of our play. The poet, therefore, was obliged to delay his hero's revenge; but then he should have contrived some good reason for it."

[137] Bennett Simon, "*Hamlet* and the Trauma Doctors: An Essay at Interpretation," *American Imago* Vol.58 No.3, pg. 709

Hamlet's delay even being considered in the literature. Hazlitt calls Hamlet "the prince of philosophical speculators; and because he cannot have his revenge perfect, according to the most refined idea his wish can form, he declines it altogether."[138] Coleridge, on the same theme, essentially characterizes Hamlet as an intellectual, saying that with Hamlet, Shakespeare "meant to portray a person, in whose view the external world, and all its incidents and objects, were comparatively dim, and of no interest in themselves, and which began to interest only, when they were reflected in the mirror of his mind,"[139] and notes that he is "full of purpose, but void of that quality of mind which would lead him at the proper time to carry his purpose into effect."[140]

Coleridge, in turn, was likely spurred to his part by German critics, especially Schlegel, as "[m]ore or less concurrently" with the English Romantics, German critics began to "'romanticize' Hamlet, emphasizing how too much thought inhibited him from action."[141] Schlegel termed *Hamlet* "a tragedy of thought,"[142] and Nietzsche saw in Hamlet a first incarnation of his Dionysian man, "the self-negating capacity to penetrate into reality; the absurdity and cruelty Hamlet perceives there make him recoil in disgusted paralysis: 'Understanding outweighs every motive for action.'"[143] Walter Benjamin saw "Hamlet as the exemplary melancholic of the baroque period, the forgotten analogue to the Weimar Germany of his own present [...] Only one figure in the vast repertoire of German mourning drama could overcome this world-weariness, and he was not German: 'The figure is Hamlet.'"[144] As Hamlet

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[138] WIliam Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespear's* [sic] *Plays*, pg. 82
[139] Samuel T. Coleridge, & A Roberts. *Coleridge: Lectures on Shakespeare (1811-1819),* "Lecture 12: The 1811-1812 Series," pg. 125
[140] Samuel T. Coleridge, & A Roberts. *Coleridge: Lectures on Shakespeare (1811-1819),* "Lecture 12: The 1811-1812 Series," pg. 129
[141] Bennett Simon, "*Hamlet* and the Trauma Doctors: An Essay at Interpretation," *American Imago* Vol.58 No.3, pg. 709
[142] Schlegel, *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, as quoted in *Critical responses to "Hamlet," 1600-1900*, as quoted in Margreta De Grazia, "Hamlet before Its Time," *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly*, pg. 366
[143] Margreta De Grazia, "Hamlet before Its Time," *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly,* Vol. 62 No.4, pg. 370
[144] *Ibid.*

critics like Coleridge "tur[n] to German speculative philosophy, so German speculative philosophy turns to Hamlet."[145]

Coleridge is possibly the first to apply the term psychology to *Hamlet*. He terms Shakespeare's method of writing "psychological," though the term would have been unfamiliar to "his readership, as is revealed by his apologetic footnote: 'We beg pardon for the use of this *insolens verbum*: but it is one of which our language stands in great need. We have no single term to express the Philosophy of the Human Mind.' While the first use of *psychological* recorded by the *OED* is from 1812,[146] Coleridge had been using the term in his lectures since 1800 to refer to Shakespeare's singular insight into character."[147]

Psychology, as it so often proves its to be, is a Delphic sword: it's a rather common theory that Hazlitt and Coleridge, "who were themselves political quietists and not men of action,"[148] were projecting onto Hamlet. T.S. Eliot's infamous essay, "Hamlet and His Problems," opens with

> [...] Hamlet the character has had an especial temptation for that most dangerous type of critic: the critic with a mind which is naturally of the creative order, but which through some weakness in creative power exercises itself in criticism instead. These minds often find in Hamlet a vicarious existence for their own artistic realization. Such a mind had Goethe, who made of Hamlet a Werther;[149] and such had Coleridge, who made of Hamlet

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[145] Margreta De Grazia, "When did *Hamlet* become modern," *Textual Practice*, Vol 17 No.3, pg. 494

[146] The OED's first use of the term 'psychology dates back to 1653:

> **1653** tr. *J. de Back's Discourse* in W. Harvey *Anat. Exercises* sig, H7v, I call the generall doctrine of man *Anthropologie*, the parts of which, I do ordain to be, according to this division, *Psychologie, Somatologie, and Hoematologie*, into the doctrine of the soul, bodie, and blood…*Psychologie* is a doctrine which searches out mans Soul, and the effects of it.

Closer to Coleridge, we get:

> **1693** tr. *Blancard's Phys. Dict.* 22/1 *Psucologie*, which Treats of the Soul.
> **1748** Hartley *Observ. Man* i. iii. 354 Psychology, or the Theory of the human Mind, with that of the intellectual Principles of Brute Animals.
> **1800** *Med. Jrnl.* IV. 187 A circumstance very interesting with respect to Psichology.
> **1836-7** Sir W. Hamilton *Metaph.* (1877) I. viii. 129 Psychology..strictly so denominated, is the Science conversant about the phaenomena or modifications, or States of the Mind, or Conscious Subject, or Soul or Spirit, or Self or Ego.

[147] Margreta De Grazia, "When did *Hamlet* become modern," *Textual Practice*, Vol 17 No.3, pg. 492-493

[148] Bennett Simon, "*Hamlet* and the Trauma Doctors: An Essay at Interpretation," *American Imago* Vol.58 No.3, pg. 709

[149] Goethe wrote a semi-autobiographical novel entitled *The Sorrows of Young Werther*

> a Coleridge, and probably neither of these these men in writing about Hamlet remember that his first business was to study a work of art.[150]

Dover Wilson would later disdainfully note that "ever since Coleridge first caught sight of his own face in the mirror that Shakespeare held up to nature, critics of *Hamlet* have gone astray largely through neglecting to concentrate upon the words of the text and the details of the action which are the first concern of an editor."[151]

We will notice here that with the Romantics, there is little suggestion that Hamlet actually goes mad, and that "for the most part, Hamlet's contemplative melancholy was simply part of his character. And the balance of theatrical opinion throughout the nineteenth century was that diagnosing madness kills the tragedy. Or as James Russel Lowell put it in the 1860s, if Hamlet were really mad he would be irresponsible, and the whole play a chaos."[152] But there is, perhaps, no better way to show the Romantics as the spearheaders of a tradition in seeing Hamlet as something other than a character in a play then by their disturbing, repeating trend in disliking *Hamlet* acted at all! Charles Lamb rather defensively says "I am not arguing that Hamlet should not be acted, but how much Hamlet is made another thing by being acted," after describing the acted Hamlet as someone"being dragged forth as a public schoolmaster, to give lectures to the crowd!" resignedly noting that "there is no other mode of conveying a vast quantity of thought and feeling to a great portion of the audience, who otherwise would never earn it for themselves by reading and the intellectual acquisition this way may, for aught I know, be inestimable."[153] Hazlitt comes out full force, writing "We do not like to see our author's plays acted, and least of

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[150] T.S. Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems (1919), *Selected Essays*, pg. 121
[151] Dover Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet*, "An epistle discovery," pg. 13-14
[152] W.F. Bynum * Michael Neve, "Hamlet on the Couch: Hamlet is a kind of touchstone by which to measure changing opinion—psychiatric and otherwise—about madness," *American Scientist,* Vol.74 No 4,pg. 393
[153] Charles Lamb, *The Tragedies of Shakespeare*, 1812, as quoted in Claude C.H. Williamson, *Readings on the Character of Hamlet*, pg. 19

all, *Hamlet*. There is no play that suffers so much in being transferred to the stage. Hamlet himself seems hardly capable of being acted."[154] Hamlet, a fan of theatre, would likely have disapproved of this, let alone Shakespeare himself.

But for the most part, Romantic era critics recognized the authority of Shakespeare over *Hamlet*, discussing Hamlet's depth of character as a function of Shakespeare's great insight into the human mind. There were some exceptions; famously, Edward P. Vining claimed Hamlet, the King's only heir, born in wartime, was born a woman and raised as a man, which explained (her) weakness of character and hatred for Ophelia. The secret was so well-kept that "possibly even Shakespeare himself never fully solved the riddle which fate gradually forced upon him as Hamlet grew beneath his hand."[155] However, these theories never gained much traction, and were often outright ridiculed; A.C Bradley declares the idea "lunatic."[156]

However, it does not seem that Shakespeare's authority was truly brought into question until the days of Freud and Jones. Freud's theories regarding Hamlet are explained above; Ernest Jones, Freud's biographer, took them a step further, transforming a few paragraphs of Freud into an essay, entitled "A Psychoanalytic Study of Hamlet," and later a book, simply called *Hamlet and Oedipus.* Unlike those before him, who considered Hamlet's personality unsuited to the act of revenge, Jones considers Hamlet to be more than capable of the task put before him, claiming Hamlet was "not a gentle soul crushed beneath a colossal task, but a strong man tortured by some mysterious inhibition."[157]

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[154] WIlliam Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespear's Plays*, pg. 86

[155] Edward P. Vining, "Hamlet's Hints of Femininity," *The Mystery of Hamlet*, pg. 92

[156] A.C. Bradley, "Lecture IV: Hamlet," *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*, pg. 92

> And we will confine our attention to sane theories;—for, on this subject, as on all questions related to Shakespeare, there are plenty of merely lunatic views: the view, for example, that Hamlet, being a disguised woman in love with Horatio, could hardly help seeming unkind to Ophelia; or the view that, being a very clever and wicked young man who wanted to out his innocent uncle from the throne, he 'faked' the Ghost with this intent.

[157] Ernest Jones, *Hamlet and Oedipus*, pg. 24

Jones claimed that Hamlet bitterly resented sharing his mother's affections with his father; however, like it is in all boys, that resentment was suppressed in infancy. However, in Claudius, he saw his father's death realized at the hand's of a jealous rival; that is, he saw in Claudius the end of the Oedipus Complex that Hamlet himself was never able to resolve, thus reigniting his childhood conflict. Thus, Hamlet was stimied by both neurosis, and by the fact that before he killed Claudius, he had to unlock the true reason for his anger, thus unrepressing years of buried desire for his Gertrude and jealously of Hamlet Sr.

Like Freud, Jones claims that variations on the Hamlet story can be found in legends all over the world, "derive[d] from universal childhood fantasies"[158] and that Shakespeare himself must have been subject to them: after all, "there must be some correspondence, however disguised or transformed, between feelings a poet describes and feelings he has experienced in some form. The act of creation would otherwise be quite incomprehensible."[159] Thanks in part to Jones, the Freudian approach to *Hamlet* became quite popular, most notably in Sir Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* film (1948)—Olivier admits to having been inspired by Jones—though traces remain as well as Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (1990) starring Mel Gibson, and even Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* (1996), Hamlet "is literally undressing Gertrude before Polonius cries for help."[160]

Major pushback against psychoanalytic readings began in the 1930s. New criticism "derided the Romantic view of characters as though they were real persons,"[161] though at times "this literary paradigm facilitated various psychoanalytic interpretations that focussed on doubling, ambiguity, and the lack of clear boundary between sanity, feigned madness, and

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[158] *Ibid*, pg. 143
[159] *Ibid*, pg. 101
[160] Sarah Rotstein, "Hamlet and psychiatry intertwined," *Australasian Psychiatry*, pg. 649
[161] Bennett Simon, "*Hamlet* and the Trauma Doctors: An Essay at Interpretation," *American Imago* Vol.58 No.3, pg. 710

genuine madness."[162] Nevertheless, the trends in analysis started by Coleridge and Hazlitt and exacerbated by Freud continued into the modern day, and even those critical of Freudian thought in *Hamlet* fell into the idea of analyzing Shakespeare through his masterpiece. Hamlet is now synonymous with the literary neurotic.

CONCLUSION

An important question to ask when considering all this is *why*? Why was there a sudden turn towards the use of Shakespeare to justify medical treatment? Helen Small theorizes that the choice was in part a move towards credibility and aspirations of gentility on the part of asylum superintendents, who in America were largely from middle class backgrounds.[163] Reiss, however, claims that Shakespeare functioned as a way to establish "cultural authority" after a period of religious turbulence resulted in Shakespeare replacing the Bible, bardolatry replacing religion "as a regulator of morality and correct behavior."[164]

As I mentioned in regards to the 1700s, insanity was gradually becoming less marked by physical symptoms. This is evident in all three of the psychoanalytic theories I choose to cover in this section—the three theories that used Shakespeare and his texts the most. Phrenology relies on outward *appearance*, not outward behavior, and even that appearance could only be judged by a professional; moreover, phrenology could make judgements about symptoms that had *not yet appeared*. Of the three, moral treatment stayed the most in line with behavioral recognition of insanity, but it still brought in environmental and moral causes of insanity, which were not as obvious. It becomes even more important when we look at the emerging relationship between

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[162] *Ibid.,* pg. 711
[163] Helen Small, *Love's Madness: Medicine, the Novel, and Female Insanity, 1800-1865*, as cited in Benjamin Reiss, "Bardolatry in Bedlam: Shakespeare, Psychiatry, and Cultural Authority in Nineteenth-Century America." pg. 773
[164] *Ibid.* pg. 784

those in the legal and medical fields, such as Halford's test or Ray's advice—more and more focus was being given to a medical definition of insanity, while in earlier centuries, recognizing the insane was self-apparent. And finally, Freudian psychoanalysts cut through that final thread, with its most fundamental principles relying on theories of the unconscious mind, where neither the insane, nor their friends or family, might be aware of their madness.

At the same time, literary criticism was moving away from analysis of plot, and towards analysis of character. Early Romantic readers developed—and answered—the character problem of Hamlet's delay, where earlier audiences considered the delay a function (whether successful or not) of the plot. These early critics considered the complexity of Hamlet's character a symbol of Shakespeare's unparalleled genius, especially when it came to insight in humans character, the same reasoning many psychologists used when they looked to Shakespeare to justify new psychiatric practices.

It is no great breakthrough to note the English Romantic's transformation of Hamlet, nor the greater trend of that period towards a theory of Hamlet's mind. But despite the inclusion of Freud on every list of Hamlet critics and early psychologists, few have paired the change in *Hamlet* criticism with the simultaneous change in psychology from visible to invisible illness. In the next two chapters, I will detail what I believe to be the underlying causes behind the connection.

Chapter Three: *What's Hecuba to him?*

❦

> *Hamlet*: 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?[165]

Soliloquies are sometimes superficially described as *a character thinking out loud*.[166] But soliloquies are far more than that. Soliloquies are a dramatic convention externalizing something profoundly internal. In a soliloquy, time stops, compresses, stretches out a moment to accommodate the length of an insight. A soliloquy shows the audience not only *what* the character speaking thinks, but *how* they think—how does a character rationalize their opinions? How do they expresses themselves when they are alone? What problems necesitate a soliloquy for this character, and how to they work through them? And Hamlet is a master of the soliloquy.

No where is this better shown than in *Hamlet*'s second soliloquy, where Hamlet decries his own inability to express the same depth of emotion as the First Player does in his recitation of Aeneas' tale of Priam's slaughter; the Player's performance is powerful enough that, even speaking in rote, it brings tears to the Player's own eyes, so caught up is he in a fiction of his own creation. Shakespeare has been building anticipation for this soliloquy. It's placed at the end of Act II, Scene 2, the first scene where the audience sees Hamlet after he learns the true circumstances of his father's untimely death. Act II, Scene I spent much of its time setting up Hamlet's reappearance, presenting a Danish court rife with swirling rumors of Hamlet's

[165] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* II.2.577-579
[166] Much of the close reading and theatrical theory in this chapter—including, but in no way limited to, this analysis of soliloquies—is indebted to the University of Michigan class English 467, "The Hamlet Semester," taken Winter 2018 and taught by Enoch Brater.

promised antic disposition: Ophelia tells Polonius of Hamlet's unexpected visit, "his doublet all unbraced, no hat upon his head, his stockings fouled"[167] and his public behavior has become so strange that Claudius has called Hamlet's old friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to court to see if they can unmask the cause of "Hamlet's transformation."[168] If we are to trust the supporting casts' words, Hamlet's plan to appear mad—whatever the details of it may be—is working.

But *O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!* is not the triumphant battle cry the audience expects to hear from a hero whose grand scheme is going well. It is no rousing speech; Hamlet does not crow about the success of his mad-act, he is not well on his way to the revenge he promised his father's ghost. Instead, the audience finds Hamlet struggling to reclaim the passion for the task he so feverently swore himself to during his last scene. In fact, he's struggling to find the words at all. Hamlet stumbles over his usual iambic rhythm:

> *Hamlet*: Who calls me villain, breaks my pate across,
> Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face,
> Tweaks me by the nose, gives me the lie i' the' throat
> As deep as to the lungs—who does me this?[169]

The first two lines start off with spondaic (two stressed syllables) feet, disrupting the usual iambic (unstressed, stressed) meter.[170] The third line further disrupts the rhythm with a trochee (stressed, unstressed), the exact opposite of an iamb. The audience, whose ears at this point have been "trained to hear five stressed syllables per line, must integrate additional information and

[167] Shakespeare, Hamlet II.1.79-80
[168] Shakespeare, Hamlet II.2.5
[169] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* II.2. 560-563
[170] Amy Cook, "For Hecuba or for Hamlet: Rethinking Emotion and Empathy in the Theatre," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism,* Vol. 25 No.2, pg. 73

the actor's speech must speed up to cram the added information."[171] This is Hamlet at his least eloquent, at a complete loss.

It's significant that Hamlet's losing his words, because it shows how much the actor's speech has affected him. After all, the play has already established one very important thing about Hamlet: he is a man of words. He's obsessed with them. Throughout the play, Hamlet talks himself in circles, into half-conclusions, he talks over himself, he talks himself in and out and back into revenge. Words are how Hamlet introduces himself to the audience. He starts the play with a pun, immediately distinguishing himself from the forthright language of the guards and Claudius' grandiose synoeciosis. Hamlet's famous for his soliloquies, and in them—once the audience is alone with Hamlet, unfiltered—how does he express himself? With words, words, and words about words.

To understand the second soliloquy, it's worth taking a look at the first one. The circumstances couldn't be more different: in his first, he is mourning his father's death and making himself sick with graphic imaginings of his mother's remarriage, his grief understandable. Neither the audience nor Hamlet yet know his father was murdered; Hamlet does not even know of the Ghost. The audience has not been primed with rumors of Hamlet's madness; in fact, at this point, we only know of Hamlet from Horatio's comment that he and the guards should "impart what [they] have seen [...] unto young Hamlet."[172] And instead of ecstatically greeting a troupe of actors and old friends, as he is in the second, Hamlet has just come from a disastrous first confrontation with Claudius and Gertrude. Hamlet has made it clear that he doesn't want to be here, in this court, in this country, or in this life; yet, he has just been

[171] *Ibid.,* pg. 73
[172] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* I.1.151-152

cowed into agreeing with his mother's request that he "go not to Wittenburg" in what Claudius, diplomatic as always, calls a "gentle and unforced accord."[173]

And once alone, how does Hamlet express himself? Through layers of extended metaphors, references to classical myth, and an inability to let slip by a chance to thoroughly unpack his heart. The world is "an unweeded garden that grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature possess it merely."[174] Compared to Claudius, his late father is as "Hyperion to a satyr,"[175] so different from his father that they are no more similar than "I [Hamlet] to Hercules,"[176] and his mother followed his father's casket "Like Niobe, all tears." [177] The "uses of this world" are not merely "weary," they are "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable."[178] He wishes that "this too too solid flesh would melt" but then reconsiders, gives himself more options, "Or that the Everlasting had not fixed / his canon 'gainst self-slaughter." While in the second soliloquy, releasing his emotions seems to calm Hamlet down—he ends that soliloquy with a solid plan to entrap Claudius into admitting his guilt—in the first soliloquy, Hamlet works himself into further fervor, abruptly cutting himself after "O most wicked speed, to post with such dexterity to incestous sheets!" with "But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue"[179] as Horatio walks in, unintentionally cutting off Hamlet's thoughts. Hamlet works on a logocentric philosophy:

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[173] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 1.2.123

> *Gertrude:* I prithee stay with us, go not to Wittenberg
> *Hamlet:* I shall in all my best obey you, madam.
> *Claudius*: Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply.
> Be as ourself in Denmark. Madam, come.
> This gentle and unforced accord of Hamlet
> Sits smiling in my heart.

At this point, before we learn of Claudius' treachery, we frankly must admire his restraint in dealing with his truculent step-son.

[174] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* I.2.135-136
[175] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* I.2.140
[176] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* I.2.153
[177] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* I.2.149
[178] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* I.2.133-134
[179] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* I.2.55-58

metaphors and language are not extras for Hamlet, but the main tools he uses to understand himself and his relationship to the world.

Yes, Hamlet is a man of words. Over and over again, he proves himself to be a man whose power comes from his ability to wield language where others wield weapons. He "speaks daggers to [Gertrude] but uses none;"[180] he attempts to catch Claudius's guilt by staging a play instead of a direct confrontation, where Laertes would later attempt the same thing through leading an armed uprising. When at a crossroads, he always chooses to unpack his heart with words. So perhaps it shouldn't be a surprise that Hamlet is so overwhelmed by another's speech that it prompts his second soliloquy. Hamlet is so good with words that it's easy to forget this fundamental aspect: Hamlet is a man of words. That is, Hamlet is not a man of flesh, but a character in a play.

And yet it seems that so many over the centuries have been lured into forgetting this most basic of facts. After all, the impetus of this very thesis is the existence of vast quantities of psychoanalytic profiles of Hamlet, when Hamlet has no psyche to analyze. Try as we might, no one can take the ink and paper of *Hamlet* and craft them into neurons and tissue. But in Hamlet's complexity, many have found the opportunity to anthropomorphize his character; an interior depth not only approximating, but equaling or exceeding humanity's is ascribed to him. As Ernest Jones explains in his introduction to *Hamlet and Oedipus*, "I propose to pretend Hamlet was a living person—one might parenthetically add that to most of us, he is so much more so than many a player on the stage of life—and inquire what measure of a man such a person must have been to feel and act in certain situations in the way Shakespeare tells us he did."[181] Or, as

[180] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* III.2.358
[181] Ernest Jones, *Hamlet and Oedipus*, pg. 18

Edward P. Vining describes it in *The Mystery of Hamlet*, "all agree in thinking of Hamlet as an actual person [...] The question is, why such unamity as to his being a man, and at the same time such diversity as to what sort of man he is?"[182] This tendency to remove Hamlet from his existence as a constructed character is especially prevalent in psychoanalysis, where "even the greatest scholars have taken Hamlet out of the text and analysed and psychoanalysed him as a human personality."[183] Hamlet is not treated as a construct, but as a human.

This chapter intends to put Hamlet into context as a man of words, both metaphorically and literally. It's about Hamlet's relationship to the stage, within fiction and in real life. Hamlet is a philosopher, an actor, a writer, and a character. This chapter examines how Hamlet's words affect the audience's—our—relationship with his character. And it examines how, and why, we are so inclined to treat this man of words as if he were more. I begin by discussing Hamlet's personal relationship with the stage and theatre conventions, then go on to discuss the role of the audience in *Hamlet*. I conclude with what's hopefully an attempt at an answer to Hamlet's question: what's Hamlet to us, or us to Hamlet?

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[182] Edward P. Vining, *The Mystery of Hamlet*, pg. 13
What Vining is truly implying here is that Hamlet was, in truth, a woman. This will be talked about later, but for now, the point still stands.
[183] Ali Salami, "The Psychological Province of the Reader in *Hamlet*," *Fundamental Shakespeare: New Perspectives on Gender, Psychology and Politics,* pg. 1

ACTIONS THAT A MAN MIGHT PLAY[184]

Hamlet, without a doubt, is a man of the theatre. Much like his skill with words, this is apparent from his first appearance: in his fourth line, he tells his mother that his grief is not simply what it "seems," the grief of black clothes and red-rimmed eyes, for those are only "actions that a man might play" on stage, a pastiche of mourning. Hamlet's grief is *real* grief.

As it does in this case, Hamlet's wordplay often falls back onto the vocabulary of the stage, both in diegetic and metatheatrical fashion. When speaking to the Ghost, he cries, ""Remember thee?' Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat *in this distracted globe*!"[185, 186] an elbow-nudge to the audience of the Globe Theatre, then continues with talk of the "book and volume"[187] of his brain. When he describes his pirate escapades to Horatio, he says "our indiscretion sometimes serves us well, when our dear plots do pall,"[188] and "thus benetted round with villains—ere I could make prologue to my brains, they had begun the play—"[189] He constantly uses language of "acting," "seeing," and changing one's "being." And as he dies in Horatio's arms, he bitterly cries to those watching, "You that look pale and tremble at this

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[184] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* I.2.84

> *Hamlet*: Seems, madam? Nay, it is, I know not 'seems.'
> 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother
> Nor customary suits of solemn black,
> Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
> No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
> Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,
> Together with all forms, moods, shows of grief,
> That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
> For they are actions that a man might play;
> But I have that within which passeth show—
> These but the trappings and the suits of woe

[185] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* I.5.95-97
Emphasis added

[186] Charles R. Forker, "Shakespeare's Theatrical Symbolism and Its Function in Hamlet," *Shakespeare Quarterly* Vol.14 No.3, pg. 221

[187] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* I.5.103

[188] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* V.2.8-9

[189] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* V.2.30-32

chance, that are but mutes or audience to this act, had I but the time—as this fell sergeant Death is strict in his arrest—O, I could tell you—"[190]

And while much of what is revealed to the audience about Hamlet remains hidden from the rest of the cast, Hamlet's love of the theatre is one thing that's clear to everyone involved. Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Polonius all hasten to inform Hamlet of the Players' arrival,[191] and no one in the court seems in the least surprised that their supposedly mad, grief-stricken prince manages to pull himself together enough to stage a show.[192]

Acts II and III are dominated by this troupe—that's a lot of *Hamlet* stage time to spend on getting one line of maybe-confession from Claudius, a line that is later rendered moot by Claudius' confessional soliloquy after *The Murder of Gonzago*. But while it's a lot for *Hamlet* to shoulder, Hamlet is more than happy to take on the burden. He is ecstatic when he hears about the Players. As soon as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern mention them, he starts to show his knowledge of the minutiae of the theatre world, asking if they "hold the same estimation they did when [he] was in the city;" when he hears acting groups of young children have become "the fashion, and so berattle the common stages," he fires of a litany of questions about the logistics of this trend.[193] Rosencrantz answers faithfully,[194] but Hamlet's eagerness to show off his acting

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[190] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* V.3.287-290

[191] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* II.2.27

[192] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* III.1.16-29

> *Gertrude*: Did you assay him to any pastime?
> *Rosencrantz:* Madam, it so fell out that certain players
> We o'er-raught on the way. Of these we told him;
> And there did seem in him a kind of joy
> To hear of it. They are about the court,
> And, as I think, they have already order
> This night to play before him
> *Polonius*: 'Tis most true;
> And he beseeched me to entreat your majesties
> To hear and see the matter.
> *Claudius*: With all my heart; and it doth much content me
> To hear him so inclined.
> Go gentlemen, give him a further edge,
> An drive his purpose on to these delights.

[193] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* II.2.330-350

chops has not yet worn off. Upon greeting the troupe, Hamlet addresses them as the characters they were in the play he last saw them in—"O, my old friend! Thy face is valanced since I saw thee last![195] And once these pleasantries are over with, he asks the First Player for a recitation. And not just any recitation: what Hamlet requests is from a play that was never acted (or if it was, only once), for it "pleased not the million," but "'twas caviare to the general." Hamlet has much to say about the fine aesthetics of this play, as it has a special place in the heart of a connoisseur like himself. He even starts it off for the First Player, showing that he has at least part of it memorized. In fact, he flubs the first line, but catches himself immediately when he notices that his original word choice throws off the beat: "*The rugged Pyrrhus, like th'Hyrcanian beast*—It is not so. It begins with Pyrrhus—*The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms*."[196] Even the ever critical Polonius, who has already shown himself to be an proponent of the already outmoded Elizabethan University style of acting during his conversation with Reynaldo[197] and will later admit to having been an actor himself in his youth, applauds his fine diction.

At this point, there is not the merest sliver of a doubt in anyone's mind that Hamlet not only enjoys the theatre, but that he's intimately familiar with it. But what is the play we end up hearing? It's far from something pronounced "trippingly on the tongue,"[198] like Hamlet will later advise the Players. Priam's tale to Dido is "a sample of futsy, bombastic rhetoric, revelling in gratuitous gore,"[199] possibly intended as a parody of "Virgilian, Senecan, and Marlovian rhetoric,

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> *Hamlet*: What, are they children? Who maintains 'em? How are they escorted? Will they pursue the quality no longer than they can sing? Will they not say afterwards, if they should grow themselves to common Players—as it is most like, if their means are no better—their writers do them wrong to make them exclaim against their own succession?

[194] Perhaps the only indication—other than Gertrude and Claudius' word—that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were ever Hamlet's trusted companions is Rosencrantz's ability to answer Hamlet's inquires here declares him a fellow lover of the stage.
[195] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* II.2.420
[196] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* II.2.441
[197] Brent M. Cohen, "'What is it you Would See?': Hamlet and the Conscience of the Theatre," *ELH* Vol.44 No.2, pg. 229
[198] Shakespeare, Hamlet III.2.1
[199] Indira Ghose, "*Hamlet* and Tragic Emotion," *Hamlet and Emotions,* pg. 21

and might be intended as a joke at Marlowe's expense,"[200] based on Marlowe's 1594 *Dido, Queen of Carthage*,[201] which would have seemed quite outdated, even as soon as 1600. Either way, it quickly becomes background noise as Hamlet and Polonius, our two critics, exchange commentary.

Polonius says the recitation is too long; Hamlet retorts that Polonius is wont to fall asleep during any play with a bit of weight to it. They are both taken aback by the term "mobled queen," though there's some debate on what provokes Hamlet's comment. Some take Hamlet's reaction to the phrase as one of "aesthetic unease," with "Polonius tak[ing] precisely the wrong stance, and [holding] to it with vigour,"[202] while others find Hamlet and Polonius in rare agreement, both "concur[ing] in applauding the choice wording of the play, enthusiastically voicing their approval of the term 'mobled queen.'"[203,204]

This conversation, along with his later instructions of acting technique to the Players, is often cited as evidence for Hamlet's knowledge of the theatre extending beyond appreciation, but into a full mastery of the craft. In fact, it is a common theory, so common that it is often not put forward as theory but as foundational fact, that when Hamlet lectures on acting technique, he

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[200] Indira Ghose, "*Hamlet* and Tragic Emotion," *Hamlet and Emotions,* pg. 22

[201] G.R. Hibbard, *Hamlet*, pg.227

The Oxford World's classics edition of Hamlet claims that

> By 1600, the style of *Dido*, which Shakespeare imitates and makes even more epic, would have appeared somewhat stiff and archaic, especially by comparison with the flexibility and range of the manner of *Hamlet* itself, and thus would serve to mark off this bit of a play-within-a-play from the play proper. Shakespeare is not holding the old manner up to ridicule, instead he is adapting it to his own purpose.

However, they do not offer any explanation as to why this is not considered ridicule: no where in *Hamlet* is traditional theatre talked well of.

[202] Joan Hartwig, "Parodic Polonius," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, Vol. 13 No.2, pg.222

[203] Indira Ghose, "*Hamlet* and Tragic Emotion," *Hamlet and Emotions,* pg. 22

[204] Allison K. Deutermann, "'Caviare to the general'?: Taste, Hearing, and Genre in Hamlet," *Shakespeare Quarterly* Vol.62 No.2, pg. 237

Deutermann mentions that this discrepancy in interpretation may be because of differences between the Quartos and Folio.

> The distinction in reception is clearer in Q1 and F than in Q2. Q2 has Hamlet echo "The mobled queen" while Polonius chimes in, "That's good." The Folio replaces "mobled" with "inobled" and punctuates Hamlet's echo with a question mark ("The innobled Queene?") that in early modern printing practices could signal either a question or an exclamation. Q1 and the Folio also extend Polonius's response into the more fatuous "That's good, Mobled Queene is good". This extended response is more ridiculous and suggests that Hamlet's echo, unlike Polonius's, is less than enthusiastic.

himself is acting as mouthpiece for Shakespeare. But beyond the tenuous connection of Shakespeare likely also having opinions on theatre, there seems to be little basis to this claim. It's dismissive to think that Shakespeare would not be willing to write a main character whose opinion differs from his own, as "even in his poetry the line between 'author' and 'speaker" are "firmly maintained,"[205] and Hamlet's behavior in the theatre is quite unlike what we would expect of Shakespeare. As Jeffery Wilson notes,

> [T]he Hamlet who pronounces on 'the purpose of playing' and stages 'The Mousetrap' is readily available to be seen as an avatar for Shakespeare and his own thoughts on drama. In this reading, Shakespeare is 'the poet of nature' who believes drama should be naturalistic (should 'o'erstep not the modesty of nature'), should be mimetic (should 'hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature'), and should be more nuanced that the popular kind of drama that appeals to 'the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise'. But Hamlet's habit of interrupting 'The Mousetrap' to tell its audience what it means—he is, Ophelia says, 'as good as a chorus'—does not gel with Shakespeare's habit of strategically writing himself and his own voice out of his drama. The Hamlet who anxiously and aggressively interprets his art for his audience seem uniquely unfit for the Shakespeare who, with a quiet confidence, always lets his art speak for itself.[206]

Moreover, it seems strange that Shakespeare, writing a play for the common people of London, would devote an entire scene—almost two scenes—to describing how bad his own audiences' taste was, especially considering that the common plays Hamlet detests are essentially the plays Shakespeare himself was writing. Shakespeare today may be thought of as somewhat "'Caviare to the general," but it certainly wasn't in Shakespeare's own day. Shakespeare certainly did not

[205] Jeffery R. Wilson, "Horatio as Author: Storytelling and Stoic Tragedy in *Hamlet*," *Hamlet and Emotions*, pg. 201
[206] *Ibid.,* pg. 201-202

shy away from jibes at the audience's expense, but they are usually variations on the theme of good natured in-jokes, not insulting them for attending his own plays. As Wiles points out, "The men who stood in the yard of the Globe would not have tolerated Shakespeare's play had they not been able to make the obvious distinction between 'Hamlet' and Shakespeare."[207]

If we look at the broader nature of this scene—more than "the main character talking about acting"—it seems that, if we were forced to choose between our two critics, the audience should align with, of all characters, Polonius. It would be difficult to cast judgements on the aesthetic value of "mobled," but Polonius is, if nothing else, a good orator; the problem, rather, is that he's too good, valuing "art" over "matter." And even if we cannot find it in ourselves to trust Polonius' rhetorical skills, Polonius aligns himself with the audience elsewhere. Just a few lines before "mobled queen," Polonius interjects, "This is too long," trying to save us from more of the Player's droning speech—ironic, as it is usually Polonius we need saving from. As much of the point of Shakespeare's departure into such an old-fashioned style for the Players is to prevent it from overtaking the important dialogue, it's unlikely that much of Shakespeare's audience would have objected. And then, Polonius' one other contribution is that the Player's acting is so emotional that it hurts him to watch,[208] something Hamlet will spend a whole soliloquy agreeing with.

Despite his great love for theatre, Hamlet is, over and over again, shown to be not particularly skilled at it—indeed, it might not be going to far to say that he is distinctly *unskilled*. Even in this scene, after showing of his acting chops, Hamlet seems to pay little attention to the actual contents of the passage he requested. Aside from "mobled," he does not make any note of

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[207] David Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse,* pg. ix

[208] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* II.2.510

Polonius: Look whe'er he has not turned his colour, and has tears in's eyes—Pray you no more.

the language. The speech he choses relates directly to him, as he must know, as it relates to revenge taken by a son, Pyrrhus, for the death of his father, Achilles. And yet, in his soliloquy, he speaks only of Hecuba. Hamlet is, apparently, not skilled in close-reading.

Or we could consider his skills an author: Shakespeare has ample opportunity to show off Hamlet's prowess, if he so chose. Hamlet's love poetry is read outloud, and Hamlet pens a few lines for *The Mousetrap*. In both instances, Hamlet's rather atrocious.

> *Polonius*: [...] Now gather and surmise.
>
> *To the celestial, and my soul's idol, the*
>
> *most beautified Ophelia—*
>
> That's an ill phrase, a vile phrase; "beautified" is a
>
> vile phrase. But you shall hear. Thus
>
> *In her excellent white bosom, these, etc.—*
>
> *Queen*: Came this from Hamlet to her?
>
> *Polonius*: Good madam, stay awhile. I will be faithful.
>
> *Doubt though the stars are fire,*
>
> *Doubt that the sun doth move,*
>
> *Doubt truth to be a liar,*
>
> *But never doubt I 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*[209]

Even Gertrude, Hamlet's own mother, seems surprised at the quality of Hamlet's poetry, asking "came this from Hamlet to her?"[210] Hartwig notes that "[t]his is not the Hamlet we know, not the

[209] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* II.2. 109-122
[210] Perhaps wondering what Hamlet's been doing at Wittenberg all these years?

serious-minded, philosophically tormented man incapable of putting aside moral questions for murder. This is another Hamlet, one who existed before the play begins and one who we are never able to glimpse except through the critical and foolish eyes of Polonius. Still, this Hamlet of the letter is a charming young man, aware that the role of courtly lover fits him ill, and yet willing to make an effort at playing the wrong role."[211]

AND LET THOSE THAT PLAY CLOWNS SPEAK NO MORE[212]

"Willing to make an effort at playing the wrong role" is a good description for Hamlet in general, for Hamlet is no better an actor than a playwright or theatre critic. As his instructions to the Players show, he knows the basics, at least in an academic sense (though even the notes in The Oxford World's Classics edition of *Hamlet* notes that "the advice [he] gives the Players seems irrelevant to the playing of *The Murder of Gonzago*, which calls for rant rather than restraint"[213]), but when it comes to putting it into play, so to speak, he falters.

Hamlet knows the theatre, even if he has no taste. He's a genre savvy character. It's an old joke that if Lady Macbeth were in *Hamlet*, she'd have revenged herself in moments, while if Hamlet was in *Macbeth*, he'd know to double-check and think through the wording before taking advice from three witches. After all, tragedy, as a genre, is about putting a character in exactly the wrong circumstances, exactly the wrong story, where it's clear that they'd be able to handle themselves in any situation other than the one they're in.

By the time of *Hamlet*'s debut, the tropes of a revenge tragedy would have been quite entrenched. It's possible even the tropes of *Hamlet* itself were entrenched. Shakespeare alludes

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[211] Joan Hartwig, "Parodic Polonius," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, Vol. 13 No.2, pg. 224
[212] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* III.2.35
[213] G.R. Hibbard, *Hamlet,* pg. 247

to the tropes of the stage ghost during the scene where Hamlet repeatedly injuncts Horatio and Marcellus to "swear." Cohen refers to it as "heighten[ing] the burlesque," appealing to "the audience's familiarity not only with the stage but also with the revenge plays to which they allude. The interlacing Latin phrase (*hic et ubique*) [is] characteristic of Elizabethan University drama,"[214] a genre embodied in the parody of the garrulous, old-fashioned Polonius. Some critics even consider the overdramatic nature of that whole scene a reference to the *Hamlet* Shakespeare based his story off of, though "of course the earlier *Hamlet* has not survived, but ridicule of it has, such as Lodge's 1596 jeer about the Ghost 'which cried so miserably at the Theator, like an oister wife, Hamlet, revenge.'"[215] As William Empson phrased it, "Shakespeare needed to satisfy an audience that 'demanded a Revenge play, and then would laugh when it was provided.'"[216]

Hamlet, critic that he is, certainly would have been aware all the conventions of revenge, and no doubt aware of the pitfalls that come with being the lead in a tragedy. Hamlet does, after all, "double-check" the Ghost's veracity before pursuing his revenge. And Hamlet is aware he is acting, and acting badly. He compares himself to the First Player negatively, wondering what the First Player would do if he had "but the motive and cue for passion that [Hamlet] has?"[217] But unlike the actor, who can mourn over the sorrows of a stranger, Hamlet is unable to rouse himself enough to fight his own battles. And even after this speech, Hamlet still tries to avoid the obvious next move, deciding instead to stage a play.

Hamlet's character arc, as it were, is about accepting the trajectory of *Hamlet*, instead of trying to subvert it or prolong it. But accepting that trajectory is accepting his own death. We see

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[214] Brent M. Cohen, "'What is it you Would See?': Hamlet and the Conscience of the Theatre," *ELH* Vol.44 No.2, pg. 228
[215] *Ibid.,* pg. 229
[216] J.C. Levenson, "*Hamlet* When New," *The Sewanee Review*, pg. 41, as quoted in Brent M. Cohen, "'What is it you Would See?': Hamlet and the Conscience of the Theatre," *ELH* Vol.44 No.2, pg. 244
[217] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* II.2.549-550

his move towards this in his soliloquies, from ignorance ("O, that this too too solid flesh would melt"), to fear ("But for that fear of something after death—"), to stealing himself for revenge ("My thoughts be bloody or nothing worth"), to that near-final moment with Horatio when he finally accepts that his role as a tragic hero is to die, despite Horatio's protestations ("There's providence in the fall of a sparrow"). *Hamlet* is a play about Hamlet learning to be an actor, and playing his role with passion.

So before Hamlet accepts his role as a hero in a revenge tragedy, what role is he playing? Hamlet tells us himself: he is to take up the role of the "antic:" the clown.

The theatrical clown is a stock character of the Renaissance, marked by indecorous behavior, whether that be through their manic actions or through their biting wit.[218] Throughout the whole first half of the play—before Hamlet declares "my thoughts be bloody or nothing worth![219]—Hamlet is acting the part of the clown. This is easiest seen in Hamlet's propensity for absurdist wordplay; this is best seen in most any conversation Hamlet has with Polonius, who he runs circles around. Shakespeare's clowns are frequently showstoppers: you can see this in *Macbeth*'s clown, for example, who does not so much soliloquize as single-handedly stop the action of the play and hold the audience captive for most of a scene. Hamlet himself comments on this during his treatise on acting:

> *Hamlet*: And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them; for there be of them that will themselves laugh to set on some quantity of barren spectators to

[218] Robert Hornback, *The English Clown Tradition from the Middle Ages to Shakespeare*, pg.2
[219] Shakespeare, Hamlet IV.5.69

> laugh too, though in mean time some necessary question of the play be then to be considered. That's villainous, and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it.[220]

Hamlet here is railing against this exact behavior: clowns forcing the action of the play to a grinding halt in order to make their lowest-common denominator jokes. But, as de Grazia points out, "Hamlet, in the rest of this scene, spends his time in dilatory punning on "fares," "Brutus," "Capitol," "metal," "lie," and country matters."[221] He makes metatheatrical jokes about Polonius, who announces that he played Julius Caesar during his time in university; Polonius' original actor, likely John Heminges, played Caesar in *Julius Caesar*, to Richard Burbage's (who played Hamlet) Brutus.[222] Hamlet is playing far more to his audience than to the necessary question of the play.[223] In fact, this whole act—the antics as well as Act III—is Hamlet playing more to his audience than to the necessary question of revenge. As he complains to the actors of over-ambitious clowns, Hamlet puts off his revenge by staging a mad-cap play.

And while other Shakespeare characters delight in wordplay and comedy, it is Shakespeare's clowns that engage in the kind of indecorous, clever, and unrelenting comedy of Hamlet. Many a critic has complained of Hamlet's cruelty towards Ophelia, paired with his crude sexual banter; perhaps this is inappropriate for a prince of Denmark, but it is not so much for a clown. Which, of course, is the whole point of an antic disposition: this kind of behavior is Hamlet "clowning around," in some part a purposeful act, part of his disguise.

No where is Hamlet's clowning more obvious than when he is face with *Hamlet*'s other fool: the Gravedigger. Hamlet has spent the play outwitting and talking circles around every

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[220] G.R. Hibbard, *Hamlet,* pg. 250
[221] Margreta de Grazia, "Hamlet's Delay," *Hamlet Without Hamlet*, pg. 147
[222] G.R. Hibbard, *Hamlet,* pg. 4
[223] Brent M. Cohen, "'What is it you Would See?': Hamlet and the Conscience of the Theatre," *pg.* 237

other character, but his oratory powers turn to dust when faced with the Gravedigger. In the battle of wits between the sexton and the prince, the sexton wins every one. For the first time, Hamlet plays straight man to the superior comedian.[224] The Gravedigger mimics Hamlet in the way Hamlet has mimicked everyone else in the play, parodying his "various metaphors and logics."[225] Perhaps the most egregious example comes before Hamlet even enters the scene; in regards to the death of Ophelia, the Gravedigger says "It must be *se offendendo*; it cannot be else. For here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act; and an act hath three branches—it is to act, to do, and to perform; argal, she drown'd herself wittingly."[226] Hamlet has spent the play struggling with the language of acting, doing, and performing—he announces himself with a pronouncement that "Nay, it is, I know not seems," and soliloquizes on the gap between what the Player can seem to feel for Hecuba, versus what Hamlet himself can actually bring himself to *do*. But in the mouth of a second clown, Hamlet's discrimination between "the three branches of an act" is presented as ridiculous.

But Hamlet's role as a clown is not merely diegetic. Hamlet has also co-opted the clown's ability to speak off-stage. Traditionally, clowns have "played a liminal role in relation to the script, standing on the margins of a play's action," which enabled them "to stop the drama to engage with the audience."[227] And, as we have already noted, Hamlet frequently speaks to the audience.

In the convention of early modern theatre, there were two types of fools: the natural fool, and the artificial fool.[228] The natural fool was one inflicted with actual madness, while the

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[224] Indira Ghose, "Jesting with Death: Hamlet in the Graveyard," *Textual Practice*, Vol. 24, No. 6, pg. 1009
[225] Brent M. Cohen, "'What is it you Would See?': Hamlet and the Conscience of the Theatre," *pg.* 237
[226] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* V.1.8-11
[227] Louise Geddes, "Playing No Part By Pyramus: Bottom, Celebrity and the Early Modern Clown," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England,* Vol. 28, pg. 74
[228] Robert Hornback, *The English Clown Tradition from the Middle Ages to Shakespeare*

artificial fool was more the court jester, whose antics were for pay. There was an implicit correlation between natural fools and truth-telling, and in his role as a natural fool, this is what Hamlet does, "mock[ing] tedious old politicians like Polonius and inept spies like Rosencrantz and Guildenster, and even weak, misguided young things like Ophelia."[229] In the world of *Hamlet*, that's what Hamlet is: insane, and with uncomfortable truths. But it's the audience who are in on the joke.

Perhaps it is only fitting that in a play about a character searching for a role to play, the main critical argument for centuries has been about which variation of jester he resembles.

MUTES OR AUDIENCE TO THIS ACT[230]

This whole chapter, we have been skirting around the idea of *audience*. Hamlet talks to the audience, Shakespeare plays off the audience's familiarity, characters are audience to other characters. So let's talk about audience in *Hamlet*. Within the play, audiences and the action of watching have important roles to play. There is, of course, the transformation of the main characters into an audience during the play-within-a-play as they gather to view *The Murder of Gonzago*. *Hamlet*'s audience is asked to view Hamlet's audience—not as characters, but as spectators themselves. This situation is carefully arranged. As mentioned before, the functional purpose of the archiac language in *The Murder of Gonzago* is two-fold: it makes Shakespeare's language seem natural in comparison, and it is so dense and unappealing that *Hamlet*'s audience

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[229] Indira Ghose, "Jesting with Death: Hamlet in the Graveyard," *Textual Practice*, Vol. 24, No. 6, pg. 1008

[230] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* V.2.288

> *Hamlet*: I am dead, Horatio. Wretched Queen, adieu!
> You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
> That are but mutes or audience to this act,
> Had I but time—as this fell sergeant Death
> Is strict in his arrest—O, I could tell you—
> But let it be, Horatio, I am dead;
> Thou liv'st; report me and my cause aright
> To the unsatisfied

is not in much danger of focusing on the contents of *Gonzago*. And, as backup, Hamlet is very willing to point out to us what we should pay attention to—he's "as good as a chorus."[231]

Instead of *The Murder of Gonzago*, the audience is called to focus on the subtleties of acting expressed by Hamlet, Ophelia, Gertrude, and Claudius, examining their reactions to the periphreal play. In the background Horatio is doing the same thing, watching Claudius to see if he shows any sign of guilt. In this, Horatio—and Hamlet, who is also watching Claudius—align themselves with *Hamlet*'s audience, all becoming Claudius' spectators. There's a certain malleability between the audience and the play in *Hamlet*, a constant uncertainness to who's doing the acting, and who's doing the spectating.

Some part of this is a result of the conventions of Elizabethan theatre. For example, let's consider *Hamlet*'s original stage. In the Globe Theatre, the boundary between stage and audience would have been much thinner than what we are now familiar with. The stage would project horizontally into the auditorium, rather than rising vertically. The projecting platform "gives the actor immediate, and in broad daylight, continuous access to his audience, some of whom filled the 'pit,' and a few of whom sometimes even sat on stage."[232] The presence of the audience was a crucial part of the theatre, who following "Ovid's then proverbial phrase, went to the theatre to seen and be seen."[233]

Early modern theories of acting, which played off Galenic humoral theory, only served to accentuate this. Ghose explains that not only did the balance of humors affect the outward passions, but that outward passions could also affect the balance of the humors. Inspired by

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[231] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* III.2.230
[232] Brent M. Cohen, "'What is it you Would See?': Hamlet and the Conscience of the Theatre," *ELH*, pg. 226
[233] *Ibid.* 227

Aristotle, it was thought that the soul "never thinks without a mental image,"[234] and that it was not only outward stimulus that could provoke an emotional response, but also mental images, whether they be memories or pure imagination. Therefore, an actor was one who "was able to exert control over his humors and their bodily articulation simply by conjuring up the appropriate mental image. This would activate the passions the character he was playing was meant to be feeling, and that he was expected to convey."[235] Hamlet himself mentions this: the Player has *forced his soul to his own conceit*, or forced his soul to respond emotionally to a fiction. Moreover, "felt emotions were thought to be contagious,"[236] so the actor, in truly feeling an emotion, was able to invoke the same emotion in the audience.

It's this liminality between the fiction of the stage and real life that leads to Hamlet's staging of *The Murder of Gonzago*. As Hamlet claims, "I have heard that guilty creatures sitting at a play have by the very cunning of the scene been struck so to the soul that presently they have proclaimed their malefactions."[237] This was a popular trope at the time, with a number of different stories circulating about people who had confessed their crimes while watching a play with similar events. The Oxford Annotated Edition of *Hamlet* postulates that "[i]f Shakespeare had a particular story in mind, the likeliest one is related in the anonymous *Warning for Fair Women*, published in 1599 and played by Shakespeare company not long before that date,"[238] which describes a woman in Norfolk who saw a play in which a wife murdered her husband, and was so moved that she promptly confessed to her own mariticide.

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[234] Indira Ghose, "Jesting with Death: Hamlet in the Graveyard," pg 24
[235] *Ibid.*
[236] *Ibid.*
[237] Shakespeare, Hamlet II.2.578-581
[238] G.R. Hibbard, *Hamlet*, pg. 235

Hamlet plays within in the culture of these ideas. By staging a play-within-a-play, he creates a metatheatrical distance between *Hamlet* and *The Murder of Gonzago*. And by stepping into the liminality allowed by his role as the fool, he adds a third layer: one that contains only him, and us.

CONCLUSION

All in all, the boundary between stage and theatre, reality and play, were already thin in Shakespeare's day. But what does it amount to? We can sum this all up rather neatly, in the "argo" style of Gravedigger. Hamlet is an actor—we see this in his every mannerism. Hamlet is an actor, ergo, he must be in a play. If Hamlet, within *Hamlet*, is an actor in a play, he must have an audience, and who else would the audience be but us? The "real" audience is brought into *Hamlet* as another layer of spectatorship. Shakespeare makes it quite clear he wants to blur these boundaries, even by simple virtue of casting Hamlet as a clown, a character archetype meant to blur boundaries.

Cohen claims that Shakespeare's goal was to "hold us responsible for our theatrical appetites," as he doesn't let us forget that we're watching a play, "unmask[ing] the fictions of our subjectivity and enabl[ing] us to see ourselves, for the shock of a moment, from the outside; we see ourselves both as the subject of the play's outcome and as the object of its most searching questions."[239] Ghose, however, argues that literature helps us understand emotions. Working off the theories of Nussbaum and Nuttal, she points out that "tragedy caters to our desire for mastery," by putting it in a fictive world the audience can control.[240]

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[239] Brent M. Cohen, "'What is it you Would See?': Hamlet and the Conscience of the Theatre," pg. 245
[240] Indira Ghose, "Jesting with Death: Hamlet in the Graveyard," 35

Whatever its ultimate intent, I would argue that in creating a liminal *Hamlet*, Shakespeare—whether intentionally or not—did not only invite audiences to live in the world of the play and identify themselves with Hamlet, but also for audiences to perceive Hamlet stepping off the stage and into the real world.

Conclusion: *Bounded in a nutshell*

❦

> *Foucault*: Is it surprising that hospitals resemble factories, schools, barracks, which all resemble prisons?[241]
>
> *Hamlet*: Denmark's a prison.
> *Rosencrantz*: Then is the world one.[242]

In my introduction, I quoted from an essay I had written in high school. In my conclusion, it's only fitting that I quote from an essay I wrote my sophomore year of college for a class on Michel Foucault. It's an essay not substantively more ambitious than my high school essay, though much more pretentious, where I asked myself something of the same question I asked myself when starting this thesis (or more accurately: a question I first asked and tried to answer as a sophomore, and continued to ask myself for the next two and a half years). Here is the opening paragraph:

> From the sheer number of works about *Hamlet*, it is easy to suspect that every aspiring literary theorist has written some critique of the play, using every lense in their arsenal. From Confucius to Freud, Socrates to Dazai, *Hamlet* has been subjected to every type of cultural, political, and social thought on the globe. I will not attempt to add the newer philosophy of Foucault to that body of work; it has been done before me, and will be done after me, by those better versed in both subjects than I am. Instead I ask: why *Hamlet*? What is our fascination with Hamlet and his psychology that compels us to

[241] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pg. 228
[242] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* II.2.247-248

> analyze and reanalyze every aspect of his character? What is his madness to us, or us to his madness?[243]

Vestigates of this essay can be found in this thesis, picked apart and scattered throughout. What cannot be found anywhere is my answer: sophomore year, I didn't really have one, let alone one that could be compressed into a four page paper. Now, armed with a thorough background in the social history of literature and psychology, as well as an understand of *Hamlet*'s liminality and role, I hope we can come closer to an answer.

ASSUME SOME OTHER HORRIBLE FORM[244]

Let us briefly summarize what we have learned thus far: Historically, insanity used to be extremely visible, marked by visible antics and wild behavior. Causes of insanity were relatively simple, if mostly incurable. During this time, readers of *Hamlet* tended to restrict their criticism and interpretations to the plot, rather than the character of Hamlet himself. However, through the centuries, the insanity gradually became *invisible*. It was not always obvious who was insane: by Freud's time, it was sometimes not even known by the patient themselves. And insanity was now curable—or at least often temporary. Insanity was no longer something one 'was,' but something one 'has.' At the same time, approaches towards Hamlet changed. People became more interested in analyzing Hamlet's character than *Hamlet*'s plot, and with that analysis came an interest in discovering the roots of Hamlet's madness, and treating Hamlet's madness as *real*.

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[243] I will admit, not a strong start.

[244] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* I.4.48-51

> *Horatio*: What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord?
> Or the dreadful summit of the cliff
> That beetles o'er his base into the sea
> And there assume some other horrible form
> Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason
> And draw you into madness? Think of it.

We have also seen that *Hamlet* is a play about plays. *Hamlet* has a self-aware hero who attempts to skirt around the conventions of a revenge tragedy by casting himself as a clown. And so, Hamlet is archetyped as a clown for the majority of the play, until he finally accepts his role as a hero and enacts his revenge. As a jester, Hamlet occupies a liminal space in the fiction of the play, breaking the boundary between stage and audience; he not only invites the audience to transform themselves into characters in the play, aligned on Hamlet's metatheatrical level, but also increases his own verisimilitude and begins to step over into real life.

In the eighteenth century, orthodoxes of correctness, especially around sanity and insanity, were becoming increasing codified, and increasingly seditious. This is the same advent of disciplinary society that was described by Foucault. While Foucault goes into some explanation of this in *History of Madness in the Classical Age* and *The Birth of the Clinic*, it is most clearly explained in *Discipline and Punish.*[245] Through the increased diagnostics of madness, as well as asylum reform, were not necessarily a bad thing—moral treatment and psychotherapy are certainly more humane than being chained to a bed—it worked to create an inescapable system of disciplinary power. Foucault points to three different instruments of enforcing disciplinary power: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement, and examination.[246]

In the case of insanity, this meant one was no longer just 'insane.' Insanity was something one could go in and out of, as it was in the case of Charles Lamb and his sister. This placed further pressure on people *not to be insane*, and created a culture of self-regulation. On

[245] Gary Gutting & Johanna Oksala, "Michel Foucault," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
[246] Michel Foucault, "The Means of Direct Training," *Discipline and Punish*

top of that, insanity was not something you could tell someone had. Sometimes, it wasn't even something you could tell *you* had. It took someone else's authority over you to identify it.

The question now is: how do these two things connect? To understand that we, like Hamlet, must take a metatheatrical step back, and consider archetypes. Namely, the archetypes of the fool, the monster, and the hero.

The fool—clown, jester, whatever you title him—is a carefully packaged agent of chaos. Clowns hold court in a liminal space, between stage and life, carefully dancing between insubordination and calculated sycophancy. They play with norms and defy category.[247] And by defying category, they implicity point out the flaws of categorization. Hamlet does this too: he defies the category of tragic hero for as long as he can. And, over time, he has come to defy our boundaries of character reality: is he a fiction, or is he a man? As Jones asks, how else are we meant to analyze a character, if we do not act upon the assumption they are real?

Traditionally, fools are aligned with ritual days of release from norms, such as the Roman Saturnalia or the European Feast of Fools. They are brief social revolutions that allow the oppressed an acceptable outlet. Slaves can order masters and peasant can be appointed the Lord of Misrule, but only on a day where nothing matters. Fools are are meant to "questio[n] the cherished orthodoxies of correctness and pee[r] around the edges of our most deep-rooted myths."[248]

Now for monster: where insanity finds its constructed opposite in insanity, the fool finds his in the archetype of the monster. With 'monster,' I refer to the host of characters who are not quite human enough to be villians: everything from Grendel to Frankenstein to Godzilla. The

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[247] T. Prentki, *The Fool In European Theatre: Stages of Folly*, pg.1
[248] T. Prentki, *The Fool In European Theatre: Stages of Folly*, pg. 1

monster, like the fool, is not usually a main character; as the fool plays second fiddle to the hero, acting as "a foil to the protagonist's behavior," or "parodies them,"[249] so does the monster. But while the fool pokes fun at the hero, makes merry with his self-importance, the monster actively defies them. And in the same vein, where the fool plays with and subverts categories, the monster escapes categorization, acting as a "harbinger of category crisis." Cohen writes of the monster's ontological liminality, a "refusal to participate in the classificatory 'order of things.'" [250]

If they are not playing the fool, what is the insane person if not a monster? It is too often that the insane are cast as monsters anyway. But in a world of increased mental illness, the monster is a character one can safely interact with. The point of the monster is to enforce taboos and cultural codes, while his archetypical counterpart is the one meant to subvert them.

The fool is a safe space in which to explore cultural taboos. Prentki writes, "The fool is the only person whom a society can permit to challenge that which it holds most sacred because he carries within his representation the default assurance that it is 'only the fool' who has uttered such blasphemies," while 'only the monster' carries no such comfort. Prentki continues, "And yet once uttered, the words are out and with them the possibility of the need to reassess whether these sacred truths still carry authority. The challenge reinvigorates society either by confirming the potency of existing values or by demonstrating the necessity to revise them."[251] The way *Hamlet* has been continuously used as a way of showing mental illness exists proves that he is ultimately used to confirm the potency, not challenge them.

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[249] Maurice Hunt, "Hamlet, the Gravedigger, and Indecorous Decorum," *College Literature, Vol. 11, No.2* pg. 141
[250] Maurice Hunt, "Hamlet, the Gravedigger, and Indecorous Decorum," *College Literature, Vol. 11, No.2* pg. 141
[251] T. Prentki, *The Fool In European Theatre: Stages of Folly*, pg 7

But while the fool is provocative, he is not revolutionary. The fool subverts cultural norms, but does not truly go against them.[252] Part of this is because while the fool may be a safe space to explore cultural taboos, to poke around their edges, the fool is not an associative place. One is not called upon to identify with the fool. While the madman was associated with unexpected grains of truth, it was not the truth anyone wanted to hear, let alone know themselves. In a world a world of increasingly informed sanity, the fool would not be a good character in which to explore.

And so we come back around: why Hamlet? Hamlet, because Hamlet is both a fool and a hero. In creating a character who deals with liminal space, Shakespeare had two choices: to create a fool, or to create a monster. In *Hamlet*, he choose a fool. Hamlet occupies a unique niche of being a hero who subverts and plays with boundaries, and a fool who one roots for and emphasizes with. In Hamlet, audiences inadvertently found a place where they could explore themselves, in a world of increasing, encroaching, and invisible madness.

[252] T. Prentki, *The Fool In European Theatre: Stages of Folly*, pg 10

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Claudius: I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet.

These words are not mine.

Hamlet: No, nor mine now.[253]

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[253] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* III.2.101-102

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