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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Madness as Crisis in Shakespeare's Hamlet and King Lear

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#### ABSTRACT

This article examines Shakespeare's depiction of madness as a complex phenomenon through a comparative study of Hamlet and King Lear. While madness has been historically identified as a strategy of performance in Hamlet and psychological undoing in King Lear, this analysis demonstrates that both plays use madness to expose underlying anxieties in the early modern period regarding the truthfulness of self-identity, the vulnerability of patriarchal power, and the interrelation between personal failure and political degradation. Through close textual analysis and engagement with new historicist, feminist, and performativity theories, the study investigates how Shakespeare uses real and feigned madness to question the nature of authority, masculinity, and selfhood in a period of crisis. Chapter one examines Hamlet, arguing that the protagonist's feigned madness operates as a strategic response to political corruption and family betrayal, yet the performance exacts a psychological toll that blurs the boundary between acting and being. Chapter two analyzes King Lear, contending that Lear's genuine madness represents the tragic unravelling of male identity, exposing the fragility beneath patriarchal rule. The findings reveal a crucial distinction: in Hamlet, madness functions as a technology of survival in a surveillance state, while in King Lear, madness is the revelation of the terms of agency itself. The comparative approach demonstrates that Shakespeare's portrayal of madness cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between pretend and real illness. Rather, it is a performative exploration of how identities are constituted, sustained, and destroyed in moments of crisis. The study contributes to Shakespeare scholarship by proving that the difference between enacted and genuine madness is not merely a psychological fascination but a necessary spectacle through which Shakespeare interrogates the nature of authority, masculinity, and selfhood in a period of crisis. These findings have enduring relevance for understanding how individuals navigate corrupt systems and how personal crisis reflects on the body politic.

#### KEYWORDS

Shakespearean tragedy, madness, early modern drama, masculinity, political corruption, identity crisis.

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#### 1. Introduction

This dissertation involves is a study of Shakespeare's depiction of madness as a complex phenomenon by making a comparative study of Hamlet and King Lear. The main issue of the study is to discuss the crisis of male identity in the situations of family treason and corruption in the political system. Despite being a long-established thematic preoccupation in the tragedies of Shakespeare, even though the concept of madness has been historically identified as a strategy of performance in Hamlet and psychological undoing in King Lear, this dissertation thesis insists on the duality of madness in exposing underlying anxiety in the early modern period regarding the truthfulness of self-identity, the vulnerability of the patriarchal power base, as well as the interrelation between personal failure and the degradation of the political.

The motivation of this dissertation arises due to the wish to fill a remarkable gap in current academic literature. Despite the widespread analysis of madness in particular plays, and the gendering of madness by gender theorists (Neely, 2004), there has been little investigation of how various forms of madness, feigned and genuine, work specifically to challenge male identity. In

addition, the overlap between these forms of lunacy and the overall political ideology of the early modern state is not well researched. This dissertation thus aims to make a contribution to Shakespeare studies by proving that the difference between enacted and real madness is not just a mental fascination, but a necessary spectacle through which Shakespeare questions the nature of authority, masculinity, and self in a period of crisis.

The major research question that will be used in this investigation is as follows: How does Shakespeare depict real and false madness in both *Hamlet* and *King Lear* to investigate the question of male identity crisis due to family betrayal and political corruption? This question results in three specific sub-questions. First, in what way is the madness that Hamlet acts out any different than the actual madness that Lear experiences, and to what end does this disparity tell us about the ways that men react to betrayal? Second, what is the way the two kinds of madness compromise the social role of king, father, and son. Third, what are the implications of the connections between madness, political corruption, and failed masculinity in the two plays in relation to issues of power, identity, and vulnerability in the early modern period?

The first chapter focuses on *Hamlet*, but claims that the apparent lunacy of the protagonist is a strategy for changing political corruption as well as showing the psychological expenses of such playing. Chapter 2 discusses *King Lear* by asserting that the true insanity of the main character is a tragic deconstructing of the male identity that reveals the frailty behind the patriarchal rule. Conclusion brings together the results of two chapters to consider what the opposition between acted and real madness tells us about Shakespeare's dealing with the issues of identity, power, and helplessness in crisis.

According to van Oort (2022), the madmen Shakespeare depicts are not, first of all, some psychologically curious characters but social and political barometers. The issues covered in this dissertation have thus not lost significance: How do people maneuver through corrupt systems? What occurs when the sources of identity are destroyed? And what is the reflection of personal crisis on the body politic?

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter explores the concept of madness in *Hamlet* on the argument that the faked madness of the protagonist is a tactical reaction against political corruption and family deceit. The difference between performance and reality, however, becomes hard to hold. The pretended madness of Hamlet becomes unclear with the real state of his mind, which brings questions of identity and the price of strategic self-fashioning. The chapter is based on the frameworks of new historicist, feminist, and performativity theories to explain how Shakespeare uses the concept of madness to challenge early modern anxieties of authority, masculinity and the self.

### **1.2 The Strategy of Madness**

The announcement of the feigning madness of Hamlet comes right after he meets with the Ghost. He informs his friends: "How strange or odd some'er I bear myself (As I perchance hereafter shall think meet / To put an antic disposition on)" (*Hamlet*, 1.5.168-170). The conditional perchance and the future tense serve as a sign of calculation as opposed to the involuntary descent. The word put on also implies costume or acting, madness, which is connected with the theatrical metaphor that permeates the play.

The article by Thomas (2020) on body language sheds some light on how the madness introduced by Hamlet functions on the stage. The antic disposition would have been represented by untidy clothing, jerky gestures, and breach of courtly etiquette. This uncertainty is noted when Polonius sees, "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't" (*Hamlet*, 2.2.202-203). Polonius also adds, "How pregnant sometimes his replies are – a happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be delivered of" (*Hamlet*, 2.2.205-208). Paradoxically, the speech delivered by the madman allows truths that sanity has to hide.

The significant scenes depict the tactical role of the madness of Hamlet. The way he deals with Polonius in the 2nd scene of the 2nd act shows that madness allows an uncomfortable truth to be told without deniability from the justice system, audience and scholars. Hamlet replies, when Polonius inquires of him what he is reading, "Words, words, words" (*Hamlet*, 2.2.189), which is an evasive answer as well as an accusing one. There is some concealed meaning in his warning of Ophelia: "Let her not walk i'th' sun: conception is a blessing but as your daughter may conceive" (*Hamlet*, 2.2.181-182). The conception is a pun on the idea of pregnancy as a caution to Polonius concerning his daughter, her purity, and behavior.

The nunnery scene involving Ophelia (act 3, scene 1) is yet another example of how Hamlet strategized his madness. Knowing that he is under scrutiny, Hamlet is tender and cruel toward Ophelia at the same time. He asks her, "where's your father?" and she tells a lie "At home, my lord," and he also answers bitterly, "Let the doors be shut against him that he may play the fool nowhere but in's own house" (*Hamlet*, 3.1.129-132). There is a multiplicity of meanings in his well-known order, "Get thee to a

nunnery" (Hamlet, 3.1.120): a nunnery may mean convent, or, in the slang of the early modern era, a 'brothel' (Shakespeare, 2006, p. 73). He goes on to say: "Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry fool, for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them" (Hamlet, 3.1.137-139). This is an ambiguity that can be interpreted in various ways without being fixed.

The play, *The Mousetrap* (Act 3, Scene 2) is the summary of the strategy that Hamlet had implemented. He performs a play to agitate Claudius. We see evidence of his calculation in how he directs Horatio: There is a play this evening before the king. One of them is close to the situation, "Which I have told thee of my father's death... Observe my uncle" (Hamlet, 3.2.73-76). His mad commentary has several functions during the performance: he says "That's wormwood!" (Hamlet, 3.2.175) when the poison is poured. When Claudius leaves in a storm, the expression in which Hamlet exults confirms his plans to be working: "What, frightened with false fire!" (Hamlet, 3.2.250). The strategic value of the madness of Hamlet is not boundless, however. Hamlet also alienates himself by making himself seem mad, thus making him powerless. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have been dispatched to remove the core of his mystery, "You would seem to know my stops, you would pluck out the heart of my mystery" (Hamlet, 3.2.356-358). Hamlet is also dangerous because of the madness that drives him. This is the force of freedom and constraint, and this is the main key to the situation of Hamlet.

### **1.3 The Cost of Performance**

Although the madness of Hamlet begins as a strategic ploy, the play evokes some doubts on whether the performance is in his control. As Hamlet points out very early on, "But I have that within which passes show" (Hamlet, 1.2.85), which becomes ironic as limits between inner self and outer performance become wavering.

The soliloquy on the relationships between performance and authentic feeling concerns the soliloquy of the "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I" (Act 2, Scene 2). Hamlet sets himself against an actor who can bring real passion to a fictional character: "Is it not monstrous that this player hear, / But in a fiction, in a dream of passion, / Could force his soul so to his own conceit, that... Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect, / A broken voice ... What's Hecuba to him, or he to her, / Had he the motive and that for passion / That I have?" (Hamlet, 2.2.486-497). The actor might cry over Hecuba, when Hamlet, with a dear father, murdered (Hamlet, 2.2.497) does not utter anything. His self-censuring goes on: "A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak / Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause, / And can say nothing" (Hamlet, 2.2.502-504). This shows deep anxiety. When an actor executes a real emotion by acting, why does the performance of madness by Hamlet not come into action?

This questioning is continued in the to be, or not to be soliloquy (Act 3, Scene 1): "To be, or not to be – that is the question; / Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer. The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, / Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, / And by opposing end them" (Hamlet, 3.1.55-59). The next two lines continue on the subject of a catalogue of suffering: "For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, / Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, / The pangs of despised love, the law's delay, / The insolence of office" (Hamlet, 3.1.69-72). It is the language of a person who is thinking of going away to escape the unbearable psychic pain.

The theory of trauma suggested by Aydin and Akgol (2018) is informative. They allege that, "Hamlet's pervasive distress and his recurrent meditations on 'self-slaughter' are not merely products of an inherent disposition but are compellingly understood as symptomatic response to severe, unprocessed psychological trauma" (Aydin and Akgol, 2018, p. 73). In this regard, the madness of Hamlet is not fully acted or fully real but is in a gray space. His father was murdered, and his mother remarried in a hurry, and all these have broken his sense of identity. And as he writes above: "O, that this too too sallied flesh would melt / Thaw and resolve itself into a dew / ... How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable / Seem to me all the uses of this world!" (Hamlet, 1.2.129-134). When he says, "I could be bounded in a nutshell and I count myself a king of infinite space – were it not that I have bad dreams" (Hamlet, 2.2.254-256), the bad dreams are another indication of a psychic reality that is greater than any performance.

A complicated example of performance/reality blurring is presented in the closet scene with Gertrude (Act 3, Scene 4). When Hamlet comes to face his mother: he asserts that "Come, come, and sit you down. You shall not budge. You go not till I set you up a glass / Where you may see the inmost part of you" (Hamlet, 3.4.17-19). As Gertrude calls for help, Polonius repeats her. Hamlet reacts: "How now! A rat? Dead for a ducat, dead!" (Hamlet, 3.4.23). His regretlessness: "Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell: I took thee for they better" (Hamlet, 3.4.29-30) implies that a man is losing hold of his performance. As the Ghost reveals himself, Hamlet is talking to someone who cannot see Gertrude meaning that she screams in reply, saying, "Alas, he's mad!" (Hamlet, 3.4.103). To the audience observing the Ghost, Hamlet's behaviour can be explained; to Gertrude, this is a sign of real insanity. The scenes are exactly where this chapter follows the ambiguity.

The performance of Hamlet is costly, including as it does his relationships. His dealings do real harm to Ophelia. His subsequent reply, "I loved Ophelia - forty thousand brothers / Could not with all their quantity of love / make up my sum" is too late (Hamlet, 5.1.258-260). The association of performance with Hamlet has changed by the last act. His reply to Horatio, "There is a special

providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be, 'tis not to come...The readiness is all" indicates a self that has also emerged to a level of quietist fatalism beyond the system of strategic performance (Hamlet, 5.2.197-200). His strategic insanity has been costly in terms of life lost, relationships ruined, and a personality that might have lost any clue to self-restraint.

#### **1.4 Ophelia's Foil**

Any discussion of insanity in Hamlet is faced with the fact of Ophelia and her actual psychological breakdown, which offers a significant foil to the 'antic disposition' which Hamlet puts on. The type of madness displayed by male characters was perceived as intellectual and political in nature, while that of female characters was not regarded in a similar manner (Neely, 2004).

The madness in Ophelia is very clear. Her collapse is triggered by the murder of her father and the rejection of Hamlet: she expresses herself in song and broken speech: "How should I your true love know / From another one? By his cockle hat and staff / And his sandal shoon" (Hamlet 4.5.23-26). Her lyrics alternate between the bawdy ballads, such as "He is dead and gone, lady / He is dead and gone / At his head a grass-green turf, / At his heels a stone" (Hamlet, 4.5.29-32) and laments. The significance of her giving out flowers is symbolic: "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance. Pray love remember: and there is paconics, that's for thoughts" (Hamlet, 4.1.33-35). The words of Ophelia have no hidden meanings behind them as does Hamlet, her words are the language of a mind which is consumed by grief, which is all.

The madness that Hamlet experiences, cost him a big deal in understanding the ability of people to judge. This means that without the act of madness, if he did not act mad, the realm of people's judgement would not be clear to him. The play does not give Ophelia anything that can be compared with the soliloquies of Hamlet. As she laments above: "O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown! The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword, Th' expectation and rose of the fair state" (Hamlet, 3.1.149-151). The image of erosion that Hamlet undergoes is not separate to her image.

This contrast is supported with the depiction of the death of Ophelia. The report that Gertrude makes of her death turns it into aesthetic spectacle: "There is a willow grows askant the brook ...When down her weedy trophies and herself / Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide / And mermaid-like a while they bore her up, till that her garments, heavy with their drink, Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay / To muddy death" (Hamlet, 4.7.164-181). In this scenario, we neither see Ophelia die, but we hear about it in terms which aestheticise her demise. As in lunacy as in death, Ophelia is a spectacle to others.

The question of Hamlet acting insane and Ophelia actually being insane reveals the patriarchal systems that their destinies are bound by. It is an agency of Hamlet to be mad with the ability to become a prince and a man. When the agency is deprived, that is what occurs to Ophelia. His dramaturgical mourning when Laertes jumps into the grave of Ophelia, and speaks, "Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead" (Hamlet, 5.1.240), is against the real pangs that brought Ophelia to the graveyard. Male reality prevails over female reality even in death.

This examination makes any straightforward explanation of the madness of Hamlet purely strategic. When the madness of Ophelia is evidently real and that of Hamlet evidently acted, why is it so hard to preserve the difference in the case with Hamlet? The use of madness, as a strategic tactic by Hamlet, does not spare his real person; the part oozes into the person, making the distinction between acting and being a blurry one.

#### **1.5. Conclusion**

We have seen in this chapter that the madness in Hamlet is not only a strategic reaction to the corrupt politics and family betrayal, but also there is a huge psychological price attached to the performance and that this performance in the end breaks down the barriers between acting and being. The works by van Oort (2022) and Thomas (2020) offered the principles of such an understanding of madness as the reaction to the crisis of authority, as the performance of body. It was also observed in the chapter that the psychological aspect of the performance of Hamlet plays out that the monologues that he uttered depict a consciousness where the line between the acting and the real emotion is now blurred. The textual analysis of the O, what a rogue soliloquy and to be, or not to be soliloquy showed that strategic performance is not capable of completely holding authentic distress.

Lastly, the comparison to Ophelia, which was interpreted using the gendered framework of Neely (2004), helped to understand the particularities of the madness of Hamlet and the patriarchal organisation of the portrayal of madness. The emptiness of Ophelia was an authentic madness, in contrast with the intellectual, performative anti-disposition of Hamlet. In which Hamlet is mad as an agency, Ophelia is mad as agency killing. This discussion of Hamlet will form the first premise of the comparative argument of the dissertation. In Hamlet, Shakespeare introduces madness as acting, a means of getting through corruption. But even here we have the costs of performance, and the edges of acting and being are permeable. Chapter 2 will be directed to King Lear where madness is not a tactic but a failure.

## **2. Genuine Madness and the Unmaking of Patriarchy in King Lear**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides an analytical look at madness in King Lear and suggests that the issue of psychological breakdown in Lear is an ultimate loss of the male self. This is quite a contrast to Hamlet where madness is applied with a higher strategy. The decision to pose as mad is a strategy of responding to political corruption that Hamlet employs to ensure that there is a certain amount of control and agency even though it is a personal sacrifice. In contrast, the madness of Lear is not a decision but a disease that engulfs him as his identity is being taken away bit by bit. This difference between an enacted and real madness is key to the greater argument concerning the focus of the Shakespearean on the crisis of male identity.

According to the chapter, the madness of Lear indicates how power and the traditional sources of feudal authority have weakened or become obsolete. The play destroys conventional notions of masculine power as the kingship, being a father, being a man, are also under challenge. Based on political theology, feminist and gender theory, and embodiment theory, the chapter demonstrates that the madness of Lear is not only personal but also political in that it represents more profound issues within the system that underpins that kind of power. This discussion consists of three major sections. The first analyses the loss of power by Lear that causes a mental breakdown and indicates the connection between political influence and self-identification. The second looks into the physical side of his madness, how his torment disputes the notion that male madness is only intellectual. The third one examines other mad characters of the play including the Fool and Poor Tom to demonstrate how the collapse of order, in order to the whole world of the play has been caused.

### **2.2 The Unravelling of Art**

Falling into madness does not begin with Lear on the heath but at the very beginning of the play as he attempts to divide his kingdom and retain its power simultaneously. The love test which opens King Lear, in which Lear insists on the daughters publicly professing their love to him as a condition to the portions of the realm, demonstrates the essential confusion between the form and the substance of authority. "Tell me, my daughters – Since now we will divest us both of rule / Interest of territory, cares of state – Which of you shall we say doth love us most" (King Lear, 1.1.48-51). Lear desires to be beloved since he is king; to lose his material basis but to be in power. This obscureness of the symbolic and the real, between the two bodies of the king, portends the mental breakdown to come.

Regan achieves the act of stripping with how she treats Lear in Act 2, Scene 4. When Lear himself is kneeling to his daughter in a gesture of extreme symbolic inversion, the father kneeling to the child, the king kneeling to the subject, the play indicates the utter breakdown of correct hierarchical relationships. By denying the claim to take him back with all his knights, by recommending him to go back to Goneril with half or none, by the joint refusal of the two sisters to give him any lodging, leave Lear literally and figuratively naked. "O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars / Are in the poorest thing superfluous" (King Lear, 2.2.453-454) expresses what the deprivation of power makes clear, namely that human identity is not a matter of bare existence, that the superfluous things the knights, the deference, the marks of status are not mere extravagances, but the stuff of which identity is composed.

The climax of this unravelling is the storm scenes on the heath (Act 3, Scene 2 and after). Unprotected by the elements, disinherited by his retinue, unwelcome by his daughters, Lear faces a world that has no order and no meaning. His appeal to the storm, "Blow winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!" (King Lear, 3.2.1) makes him one of the tempestuous elements of nature, yet it is also a sort of freedom. In case the human order has failed him, in case daughters may disown fathers and kings may lose kingship, then, perhaps, the only true reaction is to turn to the chaos. But still, even here, the madness of Lear has some logic. In essence, he describes humanity as a poor, bare, forked animal, when it is deprived of artifice. This is a deep description and one that goes beyond the reach of the sane and comfortable characters in the play. Therefore, in this interpretation, madness is not simple mental breakdown but a criticism of the denudation of illusion and that actually discloses uncomfortable facts.

### **2.3 The Body in Pain**

One of the most significant elements of the play is the physical or somatic aspect of the madness of Lear. The breakdown in Lear is demonstrated in the body unlike Hamlet, who only expresses it in clever speech and controlled behaviour, which is largely the case with him. Lear shreds his garments, fights with the weather, and has the evident signs of physical infirmity. Such moves complicate the application of classical concepts of madness, which try to consider male madness as intellectual and political and female madness as physical and emotional. The situation of Lear undermines this difference as described by Neely (2004).

The insanity of Lear is immensely connected with the flesh. Since the time when he starts to lose his mind, his body turns into a place where pain and meaning are manifested. And when he rips off his clothes on the heath, it is rather than a sign of distress only. It is a depiction of the loss of social identity, of the observable features that can divide a king and a beggar (or even an

animal and a human being). His cry, "Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton" here is not only of taking off the clothes but also of being deprived of the identity bestowed on him by the society and being left naked and vulnerable (King Lear, 3.4.106-107).

Thomas (2020) assists in understanding how the physical actions done by Lear would have been perceived on stage. She states that gestures, posture, and movement in early modern drama have rich content and are able to convey emotions and social positions in addition to the words. The audience would have had a clear glimpse of how Lear was going through his inner turmoil, which would have been demonstrated by the wild motions of the character in the storm stumbling, yelling, and grabbing at himself. According to Thomas (2020), even the body should be read as a text that is full of meaning. In this regard, the body of Lear serves as an expression of his own pain as well as a general commentary against power. Traub (2016) continues using the same concept and concentrates on the way the early modern culture perceived the body. She claims that although the body was regarded as significant, it brought about anxiety due to the weakness, decay and vulnerability. These fears are evidenced in the madness of Lear. Facing the situation of the poor, naked human condition, he observes the facts of life without securities against hunger, cold and violence. His royal status is deprived of any meaning and he is turned into a human body that is very weak.

This motif is supported by the fact that Edgar is playing the role of Poor Tom, who comes off as a poor tormented-soul. "A spirit, a spirit. He says his name's Poor Tom" (King Lear, 3.4.42). His accounts of suffering and life portray physical suffering to the extreme. Lear attempts to relate what Tom goes through to what he experiences, demonstrating that his insanity has made him unable to draw the boundaries between him and the rest of the world, between king and beggar. Lear is also mad and when compared to Ophelia takes further gendered concepts. "O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!" (King Lear, 1.5.43-44). Her sanity becomes even more clearly manifested by the madness of Ophelia, who speaks of it in songs and flowers and even dies, which is in line with the traditional concepts of female madness. The insanity of Lear, however, is a combination of the mental and physical one. It demonstrates that even the authority of males can be weak. Finally, madness in the play is not gender but a weakness of humans, which unveils social positions and identities.

## **2.4 The Fool and the Madman**

Another very specific characteristic of King Lear is its proliferation of mad characters. The real folly of Lear is confined and reflected in other forms of folly and madness, the licensed folly of the Fool, the performance of Poor Tom in Edgar, and, even, the insanity of other characters like the disguised Kent. This proliferation of lunatics characters transform the world in which the boundary between sanity and insanity, wisdom and folly is even more difficult to maintain. In this section, it is demonstrated that the spread of insanity in the play is a sign of the world in which the old orders and certainties were destroyed, and there is no certain point to stand and to judge and to rule.

The Fool is a very intricate character in this cadre of mad people. It is part of his work as a licensed fool to say the truth in apparent nonsense, to condemn power in an apparently powerless state. His connection with Lear is personal and complex: he follows Lear in the storm, attempts to console him with riddles and songs and never tells a lie, which no other character will be able to say. The fact that Lear has rendered his daughters his mothers and made them his own mothers, "Thou gav'st them the rod and putt'st down thine own breeches" (King Lear, 1.4.164-165) describes the reversal of the correct hierarchical relationships that have been pushed into motion by him. The madness of the Fool is, therefore, a kind of wisdom, a mode of speaking the truth, which the institutions of the court otherwise proscribe.

It is on the Heath that the relationship between the Fool and Lear grows. As soon as Lear starts losing his sense of reality, the Fool tries to keep him grounded with jokes and songs, but the lines between their types of madness start becoming blurred. The remark of the Fool, "I am better than thou art now, I am a fool, thou art nothing," (King Lear 1.4.184-185), acquires a new echo in the storm. It is to possess a social role, however peripheral, to be a fool, in the licensed sense; it is not to have any social role at all, to be nothing. The insanity of Lear has left him without the name of fool, expelled him altogether from the social classes.

Another complexity is added to the role played by Edgar as Poor Tom. Edgar, just as Hamlet, uses madness as a survival tactic as a means of survival in a hostile world following the false charges and pursuit. His work is based on the modern discourses of demonic possession and vagrancy and introduces a figure of radical marginality, but one who speaks of great truths. His self-characterisation as "Poor Tom, that eats the swimming frog, the toad, the tadpole, the wall-newt and the water" (King Lear, 3.4.125-126) is based upon the contemporary fear of the homelessness of the vagrant and the rural poor, of people who were not part of the institutions of household and parish which defined early modern life. "I am worse than e'er I was. 'Tis poor mad Tom / And worse I may be yet; the worst is not" (King Lear, 4.1.28-29). This quote demonstrate that Tom is the absolute 'Other', the man who has been deprived of all social identity.

It is touching and revealing that Lear identifies with Tom immediately. "Didst thou give all to thy two daughters? And art thou come to this?" (King Lear, 3.4.48-49). He supposes that Tom, as well as he himself, has to have provided everything to his daughters, a misrecognition that informs us more about the obsession of Lear than about the case of Tom. And yet it also shows the extent to which the barrier between self and other has been lost due to the fullness of the madness of Lear. "Is man no more than this?" (King Lear, 3.4.101). Lear, in his sound state of mind, could never have found it in his heart to identify himself with a beggar on the street; in his lunacy, the lines of rank and importance which divided the two have been erased. The nakedness of Tom is the reflection of the nakedness of Lear; the seeming insanity of Tom is the reflection and the increase of the real insanity of Lear.

The performance and authenticity issues that arise in Chapter 1 are also reflected through the treatment of these multiple mad characters in the play. "That's something yet: Edgar I nothing am" (King Lear, 2.2.192). It shows that the insanity of Edgar is obviously a tactical role-playing to survive, as is the case with Hamlet. The madness of Lear turns out to be definitely real, a breakdown that he cannot either will, reject or manage. "Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise" also indicates that the folly of the Fool is a professional folly that he lives in his occupation (King Lear, 1.5.41-42). However, these differences grow more and more challenging to sustain throughout the play. The performance of Edgar as Tom is starting to take its toll on his identity; his remarks on the misery of Lear, made in the character of Tom, have the truth and sincerity behind them. The true insanity of Lear, as treated in Section 2.1, gives him a sort of critical eye, which resembles wisdom. When the world has simply gone nonsensical, the professional nonsense of the Fool starts to appear as the only sense there is.

The loss of the Fool to the play he merely disappears after Act 3, and the reason has baffled critics over the centuries. "When we are born we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools. "This is a good block" (King Lear, 4.6.178-179). These statements connect Lear with folly, positioning Lear as a theorist of human experience. The possibility of reading is that, after Lear has indeed gone mad, the role of the Fool has been fulfilled. Lear does not require anyone to speak truth by seeming nonsense since he now speaks that truth. Indeed, he says "My wits begin to turn," signifying that the licensed role of the Fool is subsumed in the real madness of Lear, and he can just fade away, when his job is accomplished (King Lear, 3.2.68). This reading is consistent with the thesis that Lear gains some form of insight through his madness; despite all its expenses, the structured world of the court is not able to accommodate.

### **2.5 Conclusion**

According to this chapter, the madness of Lear demonstrates the failure of the male self, whereas the madness of Hamlet is a deliberate and calculated performance. It relates to the concept of political theology to describe why Lear loses his kingdom and collapses mentally and the fact that identity is something that needs to be supported by outside sources. The concept of the two bodies of the king by Kantorowicz (1957) can be used to understand the danger of the situation when Lear mixes his personal and his kingly identity and van Oort (2022) only puts this into the context of the whole crisis in authority of the early modern era. Another aspect in which the chapter examines the physical aspect of the suffering of Lear is how his madness has made it hard to separate the mind and body. It relies on Neely (2004), Thomas (2020), and Traub (2016) in order to argue that this shows one of the weaknesses that patriarchy attempts to conceal. Although the madness of Ophelia exposes the frailty of women in the patriarchal society, the madness of Lear exposes the frailty of the patriarchal society.

### **3. Final Synthesis and Conclusion**

The comparative study reveals that Shakespeare's portrayal of madness in Hamlet and King Lear cannot be described as a juxtaposition of pretend and real illness. Rather, it is a performative exploration of the processes of constituting, sustaining and destroying identities in crises. So, the basic distinction between the two plays, in a way, is not primarily a theatrical tactic and a psychological breakdown, but a way in which agency functions or a sign of a foreclosure structurally.

Specifically, in Hamlet, madness becomes a technology of survival in a surveillance state with the legit authority replaced. Hamlet is an anti-disposition, which allows the strategic deployment of unreason to reveal what the real apparatus of power can't reveal; the truth, Foucault says, is the one that the real apparatus of power cannot tell (1965, p. 37). But it's more than that: there is a more complex understanding of the play, namely that performative madness cannot be tamed, and that, moreover, there is no difference between strategic self-fashioning and psychological dissolution when it comes to identity construction. More than that, it is not Hamlet's hesitation to act; it is his understanding that, in the context of political illegitimacy, there is no one else or one before him to act. So we can say that he's a tragic hero because once embraced, strategic madness is the same that eats away the person it's supposed to protect.

King Lear's analysis is inverse, structure, but not concept. As Hamlet's madness is an outgrowth of his acting, so Lear's is the revelation of the terms of agency. The play methodically strips away the external props, knights, deference to kingship, and to fatherhood, which Lear enjoyed as king and father. The two bodies of the king theory of Kantorowicz (1957, p. 7) provides

illumination on what is at stake: his error was not in dividing his kingdom into two parts, but that the body natural would survive the death of the body politic. His madness then is not only the collapse of the mind, but the shocking realization that the institutional structure that sustains patriarchy is the structure of patriarchy. Neely (2004) suggests that while the female dichotomy of madness and the female was the side of patriarchy, the male dichotomy of sanity and the male was the weak side of the gendered binaries, and thus the somatic aspect of Lear's suffering represented this.

In both plays, there is no mention of the idea of an essential explanation of mental illness; instead, the causes and effects of mental illness are located within specific configurations of family, state, and gender. The solipsism of Hamlet and the actual downfall of Lear represent the two extremes of one bad problem: How the male subject deals with itself when the institution of masculinity is unsustainable. Political theology, reflected in the two plays, suggests that one could not separate the self from the system of authority it rests on, and that in a situation where such systems are not working, madness is inevitable and, fittingly enough, the only means of communication.

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