M.A. Thesis

MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARE'S MAJOR TRAGEDIES:
A TENTATIVE ANALYSIS TOWARDS A LAINGIAN INTERPRETATION

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina
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À minha tia

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation deals with the theme of madness in the four major tragedies of Shakespeare: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth. Its main purpose is to show that the heroes of these tragedies display very individual characteristics which are adaptable to the modern ideas of R. D. Laing about madness.

Departing from the Medieval and Renaissance theories on the subject, this work analyses mainly three aspects in each tragedy: the therapeutic function of madness, the fact that the heroes are always able to recover from it, and the idea that the society where madness appears is itself usually "mad" and corrupt.

The whole body of this dissertation aims at pointing out the universality of Shakespeare's genius, since the themes which he had so skilfully treated in his tragedies are still being discussed today in the light of contemporary theories.

RESUMO

Esta dissertação é sobre a tema da loucura nas quatro maiores tragédias de Shakespeare: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear e Macbeth. Seu principal objetivo é mostrar que os heróis destas tragédias apresentam características bem individuais, as quais se adaptam às idéias modernas de R. D. Laing sobre a loucura.

Partindo de teorias medievais e renascentistas sobre o assunto, este trabalho analisa principalmente três aspectos em cada tragédia: a função teropêutica da loucura, o fato de que os heróis são sempre capazes de se recuperarem da mesma, e a idéia de que a própria sociedade onde a loucura aparece é geralmente "louca" e corrupta.

A dissertação, como um todo, visa realçar a universalidade do gênio de Shakespeare, uma vez que as temas por ele tratados, com tanta maestria, em suas tragédias ainda são discutidos hoje, à luz das teorías contemporâneas.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 - Statement of Problem

Two of the main factors to which we owe the tremendous popularity of Shakespeare's work are his treatment of universal themes and his skillful portrayal of human characters. It is the aim of this dissertation to study characters and contrasts in characters as they are depicted in the four major tragedies of Shakespeare: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth. The theme chosen as a connecting link among them is madness.

Madness, as it is explored in Shakespeare's tragedies, is a fascinating theme. Indeed, it must have fascinated Shakespeare too, because it appears recurrently in the poet's work, even outside the tragedies. It is symptomatic, for instance, in Midsummer Night's Dramm, that Theseus should address the lovers with a speech where the madman, the lover and the poet are said to be "of imagination all compact." It is also very important, and of particular interest for this dissertation, that lovers and madmen should, in Theseus' words, "apprehend more than cold reason ever comprehends" (V.i). It is as if Shakespeare put madness together with love and poetry in a level above that of mere rationality.

In the tragedies, however, things are left less explicit, and it is my purpose here to try to clear them up. Each of the four tragedies to be studied in this dissertation has at least one mad character among its "dramatis personae." And I say "at least" because, besides the heroes, there are also secondary characters who display traits of madness. In Hamlet there is Ophelia, whose sweet lunacy sharply contrasts with the hero's feighned and bitter madness. Othello is maddened by

the machiavellian, sadistic Iago, whose "motiveless malignity" is, as we shall see later, a proof of his own peculiar kind of madness. King Lear also presents to us two mad characters, Lear and Edgar, the former truly and desperately mad, and the latter, like Hamlet, just pretending to be insane. As for Macbeth, there can be no doubt that both the hero and Lady Macbeth are also, in a way, mad. Each of the four tragedies will be fully discussed in later chapters of this dissertation.

There, while analysing and comparing Shakespeare's mad characters to each other, I will be trying primarily to discover if there is a pattern in their madness. Are Shakespeare's madmen psychologically individualized, or merely the victims of cosmological disorder? Is there some formula that will fit them all, or can we identify in each case a different and specific kind of madness? This is going to be the main concern of this dissertation, but I am also interested in asking some other questions. How does madness come to be in each character? Which consequences does it bring forth? Is madness essentially bad for a person? Which forms can it assume? Is it correct to think of lunatics as people completely devoid of reason and feeling? Can a totally rational and calm person be mad in some way? Can a passionate and frantic person who acts like a madman be said to be somehow sane? Can madness work as a process of purification or as therapy for other evils?

The answer to such questions will be given throughout this dissertation, and they will be studied against the background of the Elizabethan world. Madness, its causes and manifestations, and also its relationship to Cosmology and Folly were subjects which fascinated both the Medieval and the Renaissance man. Chapter two provides a discussion of these themes.

It will also be important here to analyse the mad characters of the tragedies as citizens of particular societies.

Each of the four plays is set in a different country, in a different kind of environment: Denmark, Venice, Ancient Britain and Scotland. Does this fact have any influence upon the characters' madness, or are these different societies only a shadow of the environment of Elizabethan England? Is a presumably good and healthy society which marginalizes madmen so good and healthy as it seems?

It has been said that madness is a sickness of civilization, of the cities. Probably this is not always so, but there is a great deal of truth in it. Michel Foucault and R. D. Laing are two psychiatrists who share this view in our time. M. Foucault's Madness and Civilization offers a historical view of madness from the Middle Ages until the seventeenth century, the age of reason, when there is a transition from the humanist experience of madness to our own experience. Dr. Laing's work contests the usual assumption about normality with a radical and challenging view of the mental sickness in our society. Shakespeare had already investigated such problems; he was a genius living ahead of his own time, foreseeing, so to speak, the kinds of troubles and anxieties which would be afflicting men in our modern world. Therefore, this dissertation will be trying to relate Laing's ideas to the analyses of Shakespeare's tragedies, discussing such problems against the background of Elizabethan beliefs.

Structurally, the work is divided into six chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter, to which this introduction belongs, also contains a review of the previous criticism about the four tragedies. The focus of that section is kept upon the way critics see madness in Shakespeare's work. This chapter also includes a small conclusion in the end. Chapter two, or "the background chapter," has three main sections: "Madness in Shakespeare's Time," "Madness and Cosmology" and

"Madness and Folly." Under these headings I have tried to summarize the Elizabethans' beliefs about madness, universal order, man's place in the "chain of being," and so on. This background of contemporary philosophy, medical theories and superstitions in general is very important for the understanding of Shakespeare's mad heroes. Chapters three, four, five and six each analyse one of the tragedies to be studied here.

1.2 - Review of Previous Criticism

a. Introduction

In this section, five different lines of criticism will be shown: the nineteenth-century approach of "character analysis"; the historical approach of the early twentieth century; the "new" criticism which had its beginnings in the 1920's and extended its influence throughout the century; the "psychological" school of criticism and, lastly, what might be called the "anthropological" school.

Nineteenth-century critics of Shakespeare tended to think of the characters involved in the action of the plays as representations of real persons living real situations in the real world. It is broadly acknowledged today that this approach inevitably takes the critic away from the play as play, into considering the imaginary events described there as exterior to themselves. A. C. Bradley's Shakespearean Tragedy (1904) was the culmination and final brilliant summary of this school of thought; and although most modern critics agree that he has pushed character-analysis perhaps too far, they are also unanimous in admitting that Bradley's work is a landmark in Shakespearean criticism.

With the turn of the century, two schools of Shakespearean criticism have dominated: the "historical" critics and the so-called "new" critics. The historical line of criticism

holds that any writer from the past should be studied in the light of contemporary knowledge and beliefs. In other words, the historical critic should adopt the position of the Renaissance men who watched Shakespeare's plays and who were, no doubt, his first critics. Therefore, it is of primary importance for the historical critic to study, to understand and analyse the period in history when Shakespeare lived and worked.

The "new" critic also wants us to enter the world of the plays, but by a different route. He believes that each particular play creates its own poetic world, a world which may, in some respects, be like our real world, but which is also, in many other points, different. The "new" critic accepts the work of literature as it is, and he puts aside judgements of value and such problems as biography and historical background. By paying careful attention to every detail that comes to form the poetic whole, the "new" critic undertakes to study the play's language and its imagery. Norman Holland says in The Shakespearean Imagination that "any real appreciation of the play involves understanding all of it, both story and poetry, more properly, story as poetry."[1]

Under the title "psychological school" I intend to include some of the most outstanding critics who devoted their works to analyses of Shakespeare's tragedies from psychological or psychoanalytical points of view. This kind of approach can be said to have been born with Bradley himself and his "character-analysis" technique. A new and vigorous impulse was given by Freud's theories of psychoanalysis, and for a long time much has been written about Shakespeare's heroes on the basis of these theories. Freud is still accepted and followed in modern psychoanalysis, but more recent studies have been developed. R. D. Laing's "existential-phemomenological" approach, which is central to this dissertation, is an example of this.

The "anthropological" critics are all those who centered their works on the elements of social ritual in the drama, and particularly on the much discussed figure of the Fool. It is not easy to say exactly when the interest in the Fool began, but it is certain that Enid Welsford's book The Fool (1935) is a landmark on this subject, and almost every critic owes something to her work. Her chapter "The Court-Fool in Elizabethan Drama," together with Glenys McMullen's essay "The Fool as Entertainer and Satirist" (Dalhousie Review, Spring 1970), form the core of my discussion of the "anthropological" critics.

Having sketched the general lines of the five schools to be studied here, it is time now to look at them more closely. It must be remembered that madness will be the prevailing theme throughout this discussion; any other subject relating to Shakespearean criticism will be "slighted."

b. The Critics

The first of these critics is Professor A. C. Bradley who, in 1904, published his Shakespearean Tragedy. Bradley sums up the nineteenth-century tradition of "character-analysis." He puts special emphasis on the fact that the hero's fall proceeds mainly from his own actions. The hero, generally a man in "high degree or public importance" and the owner of an exceptional nature, shows a marked "one-sidedness," a pre-disposition in some particular direction, and a total incapacity to resist this force. The "ultimate power of the tragic world" is, for Bradley, a moral order which, though not regardless of human weal, determines the character's native dispositions and, consequently, his actions. For these, the hero is morally responsible; and he must be so, Bradley says, if we are not to lose the central meaning of tragedy. It is human action itself the main tragic fact, the cause of catastrophe.

It is then not surprising that, centering his criticism on character-analysis and on action, Bradley's discussion of madness should also follow this trend. Through detailed comparison and dissection of the characters, Bradley leads his analysis to the discovery of those peculiar pre-dispositions in each of them which determine their respective states of mind.

Therefore, Hamlet's peculiar character is responsible for his delay, causing reflectiveness and irresolution on his part; this is what the Elizabethans would have called a melancholic temperament. But Bradley emphasizes that it is melancholy, not insanity. "No doubt it might develop into insanity . . . and the man might become, as we say, incapable and irresponsible." Hamlet, however,

> is considered irresponsible neither by other people, nor by himself: he is only too keenly conscious of his responsibility. He is, therefore, so far, quite capable of being a tragic agent, which an insane person, at any rate, according to Shakespeare's practice, is not.[2]

Indeed, it must be emphasized that, for Bradley, abnormal conditions of mind such as insanity, somnambulism hallucinations and the like, are only additional factors to the tragic action. This means that deeds issuing from these factors are not expressive of character, and free the hero from moral responsibility whenever they are introduced. This is why Hamlet, though probably not very far from insanity, is never, for Bradley, mad. This is also the reason why Lear's mind, at the beginning of the play, is but "beginning to fail with age," and not yet insane. If he were really mad when he divided the kingdom, he would cease to be a tragic character. Bradley calls special attention to the fact that Lear was a man of choleric termerament, given to precipitance, selfishness, despotism, and uncontrolled anger. But he is also generous,

unsuspicious, and of an open and free nature. It is these elements, combined, that determine Lear's pre-disposition for madness.

The same happens in Bradley's analysis of Othello and Macbeth. Othello's was an exceptional character: noble, romantic, full of imagination, and indisposed to jealousy. But he was also open to deception and, if wrought to passion, likely to act with little reflection and no delay. This brings madness of rage and revenge, and leads to the hero's loss of self-control. Macbeth's character is pictured as rich in honour, conscience, humanity and courage, but he is fired by the passion of ambition to a conscious acceptance of evil. His peculiarly great imagination could have saved him, but Macbeth understands himself very little, and thus he becomes mad with horror at his own deeds.

Among the most influential historical critics, I have chosen to discuss Professor Lily Campbell's book Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes--Slaves of Passion, which appeared in 1930. Her work offers a study of Shakespeare's heroes in the light of the medical and philosophical teaching of the period. Campbell states her firm conviction that Shakespeare was primarily concerned with passion rather than with action. Her opinion, firmly based upon Elizabethan beliefs about moral philosophy, medical jurisprudence and history, is that tragic action springs from the dominance of uncontrolled passion over reason in the hero's soul.

The second part of her book, "Moral Philosophy in Shakespeare's Day," displays several "diseases of the soul" which were believed to exist in those days, and also the various causes for them. Madness was one of these diseases. It becomes clear from Campbell's discussion of the problem that madness, as well as melancholia, fever and drunkenness all

resulted from the action of uncontrolled passion upon soul and body.

Campbell proceeds to show how the tragic hero is always pre-disposed for tragedy because of these devastating effects. Thus, in her discussion of Hamlet, we are shown a grief-striken man dominated by an unnatural melancholy, and who can only act in moments when an unreasonable passion grows beyond all restraint into momentary madness. Othello, also a "slave of passion," is wrought to the verge of madness by Iago's plot. Jealousy was believed to be more common among people of "hot" complexions and, as a Moor, Othello is the perfect choice for a study on this passion. As for King Lear, the dominant passion is anger which, in its association with Lear's choleric temperament, becomes unnatural and intemperate. In consequence, it clouds reason and can bring madness in its train. Macbeth, like Hamlet, is also brought through unnatural melancholy to the verge of madness. The passion that stirs him, however, is fear. He is subjected by ambition to the temptation of the supernatural, and grows desperate. In the end, he shows off a passion which is the very opposite of the fear that burns in his soul: courage.

Campbell's is a vigorous and coherent discussion of a central component of the tragedies, and the ideas contained in her book are of particular interest for my dissertation; they will be dealt with separately, in the section about universal order and chaos.

As a representative of the "new" critical approach to Shakespeare's plays, I have chosen Professor G. Wilson Knight, whose book The Wheel of Fire (1930) is his major work on the tragedies. He gives the plays an essentially imaginative approach, paying attention not only to character and plot, but also to symbolic and poetic atmosphere. Knight discusses each

tragedy regarding them as "visionary wholes, close-knit in personification, atmospheric suggestion, and direct poetic-symbolism."[3] This is what he calls the "space-time approach." It is thus in terms of images that Knight tries to explain Shakespeare's heroes and their behaviours. His ideas about madness in each of them come as consequence.

The central image in Hamlet is, for Knight, death; the hero's soul is sick to death. He has undergone all loss of purpose, melancholy, and disgust. Hamlet is commanded to heal and create harmony in the rotten state of Denmark; but "good cannot come from evil," Knight says. Hamlet's own state of being is not harmonious itself; he has held discourse with death, he has seen through humanity, and what he saw made him cynic-sick. Shakespeare purposefully set his hero on the knife-edge between madness and sanity, for Hamlet's behaviour, though it certainly tends towards madness, is but the abnormality of extreme malancholy and cynicism.

As for Othello, Knight talks mainly in terms of language and imagery. Thus, Othello's noble and heroic qualities, as well as his soldiership, are reflected in his speeches. As Iago's plot gains influence upon him, Othello's mind collapses under the extreme of anguish, and his speech rapidly degenerates. When he raves and falls to the ground, his language, so to speak, goes with him; he becomes ugly, idiotic. Thus, Knight emphasizes this sharp dualism between images of beauty and ugliness, between poetry and rash language, nobility and idiocy.

In Macbeth, on the contrary, the one image around which the whole tragedy seems to revolve is that of fear. Ambition is the passion that determines the action, but fear pervades the whole play. There are also images of blood, darkness, sleep, chaos, and so on, but fear is the major one from which all the others spring. The fear that paralyses everyone else

in the play, urges Macbeth to the choice of evil. He is, like Hamlet, melancholic, and his melancholy, fixed on something negative, yet powerful, prepares the process by which his mental state forces him to actions of blood and destruction.

Knight's discussion of King Lear leads him to talk about naturalistic images. Lear, a selfish, high-tempered and autocratic old man who is, at the same time, childish, foolish, but very human, revolts at the thought of his daughters' injustice and tries to become part of the natural world. Therefore, he joins the company of beggars and madmen, and his unbearable pain gives way to pitiful insanity. This is exactly what Knight defines as madness: it is "the breaking of that which differentiates man from beast," "the disjointing of mind by the tug of two conflicting principles"[4] forcing in different directions, till the reason snaps.

Ernest Jones, Freud's friend and biographer, was perhaps the first great name in the psychological school of criticism. He applies the technique of psychoanalysis to the solution of Hamlet's delay, following the Oedipus-complex theory, named by Freud after Sophocles' hero. On general lines, what he is saying is that Hamlet, in his infancy, had developed a deep resentment for having to share his mother's affection even with his own father, whom he saw as a rival. So he had always wanted to take his father's place, but filial piety inhibited him from fulfilling these wishes, which were repressed. Claudius's crime, however, and his marriage to the Queen put these desires once more into action in Hamlet's mind, and he immediately identified with his "uncle-father," who had accomplished what he himself would like to have done. But Claudius was at the same time a rival, the hated image of the (step)-father, replacing the late King in Gertrude's affection. Willing to kill Claudius to put him out of the way, and also to

avenge his father, but feeling at the same time that he would thus destroy his own "self" projected in his uncle, Hamlet thus refrained from action and delayed.

Jones thus classifies Hamlet within the category of psychoneurotics, "driven or thwarted by the 'unconscious' part of his mind,"[5] divided by an internal conflict. He had two impossible alternatives: either to ignore the Ghost's call for revenge and abandon his duty, or to kill his mother's husband, which, besides being equivalent to the original murder, also meant destroying the deepest part of his own personality projected in Claudius. This is, for Dr. Jones, what renders Hamlet paralysed and makes him delay.

Since the time Ernest Jones wrote of Hamlet, many other critics have applied Freud's theories to the other tragedies of Shakespeare. In the case of Othello, for instance, much has been written on the subject. In his essay "Othello's Desdemona," Stephen A. Shapiro gives a very concise account of the critics' views. He says that there are two basic lines of reasoning in the psychoanalytical criticism of Othello.

> The first, exemplified by Dr. Martin Waugh or Prof. Gordon R. Smith, explores Iago's homosexual attraction to Othello. The second, represented by Dr. A. B. Feldman, Prof. John V. Magogian, or W. H. Auden, traces Othello's doubts about his virility, or his insecurity as a black man in a white world, and shows why Othello is an easy prey for Iago.[6]

Shapiro, however, offers a supplementary point of view to these two, a third analysis which focuses on the relationship between Othello and Desdemona, and not on that between Othello and Iago. What he says is that Othello never sees, either through failure or refusal on his part, that he hates Desdemona while believing that he loves her. He loves the virginal-maternal idol he has created in her, but at the same time he must destroy this idol who inhibits his instincts.

According to Shapiro, Othello is "psychically impotent," which means that he cannot love Desdemona and have sexual desire for her at the same time. Thus he must debase and destroy the virgin idol of his worship, which he does in the brothel scene and also later in the murder, "a symbolic enactment of sexual intercourse, . . . an ironic consummation of the marriage of Othello and Desdemona."[7]

Another line of interpretation within the psychological school regards the "double man." According to this school the conflict subsists not simply "within" Othello or Iago as separate individuals, or "between" them, for the reason that the two characters taken together constitute a single psychological entity. Othello and Iago are thus seen as two decomposed parts of a single self. This analysis was first proposed by Ludwig Jekels, before 1917, but he applied it to Macbeth and his Lady, and not to Othello. His article "The Riddle of Shakespeare's Macbeth" was reprinted in Psychoanalysis and Literature (New York, Dutton, 1964), but had already been read by Freud, who wrote:

> He (Jekels) believes that Shakespeare often splits a character up into two personages, which taken separately are not completely understandable and do not become so until they are brought together once more into a unity. This might be so with Macbeth and his Lady. . . . they are like two disunited parts of a psychical individual.[8]

As for King Lear, the play has undergone all types of psychological interpretations because Lear's madness is a favourite theme for this kind of analysis. Freudian interpretations of King Lear unavoidably point to an element of incestuous passion in Lear's love for his daughters, and it is not difficult to find evidence of this, for instance, in his rage at Cordelia's reasoning that half of her love should belong to her husband.

A more recent study of the psychology of King Lear has been developed by Alan Sinfield in relation to R. D. Laing's theories about the "self." Sinfield tries to explain Lear's behaviour, his madness, and the action of the play through the assumption that Lear does not know himself and is therefore defective in his understanding of, and interrelation with others. Sinfield quotes Laing:

> Every human being, whether child or adult, seems to require "significance," that is, "place in another person's world." . . . It seems to be a universal human desire to wish to occupy a place in the world of at least one other person,[9]

and he goes on to say that "everyone needs recognition by others of his significance as a person in order to establish a feeling of his own identity."[10] Lear wants to be sure that he is loved by someone, and he seeks a demonstration of love. He imposes an artificial situation on his daughters, for want of a natural one; but what he asks of them is incompatible with the situation. Lear sets up a bargain for love, which two of the sisters accept, but Cordelia's refusal enrages him: he is not used to a kind of relationship where bargain does not take part. When he realizes that he has done wrong, he has to re-define himself, now no more in terms of "a loving father," but simply as "a poor old man, as full of grief as age; wretched in both." (II.iv)

Therefore, Sinfield affirms that,

> Lear's madness lies not in the (false) notion of unnappreciated generosity, but in the growth of a simultaneous and contradictory awareness that he was not generous, that he is not the person he has taken himself to be.[11]

Finally, we have come to the "anthropological" school of criticism. The "Folly critics" can be said to be "Laingian" to the extent that they do not see madness as real madness, but as a form of social criticism. According to Welsford, the Fool is an "all-licensed" critic who points out to others the

dangerous possibility of a reversal of position between the wise man and the Fool.

> . . . the fool suggests that there is ambiguity in the words wisdom and folly. . . . Here he is hinting at thoughts which are vitally connected with the central theme of tragedy.[12]

Indeed, the Fool is a truth-teller, a man who by force of his profession sees clearly through people and situations and reports what he sees there. But he does not expect to be believed, because his words are the words of a Fool, and people usually regard them as jokes, not as a sincere piece of advice. This is why the Fool is "all-licensed": there is never the possibility of offence in an innocent joke.

Those who laugh at the Fool, however, should pay more attention to what he says and also to their own actions, because they themselves run the risk of being turned into fools. This happens in King Lear, for instance, in Act I, scene iv; when the Fool has taught his lesson about the difference between a bitter and a sweet fool, Lear asks him,

> LEAR: Dost thou call me a fool, boy?
> FOOL: All thy other titles thou has given away; that thou wast born with. (I.iv.133-135)[13]

This "fooling of others" is also true of Othello, that, at first sight, does not seem to have a fool among its "dramatis personae." Yet, it has two. Iago and Othello are the fools in this tragedy: the former is a witty, satirical jester, cynical and egoistic, but still disguised as an "honest" man. Othello, on the other hand, is the fool's victim, the one who has a high opinion of himself and is turned into a fool by Iago. William Empson says in his "Honest in Othello," that Iago "will practise on Othello even to madness," which can be fitted "into the picture of the clown who makes 'fools' of other people."[14] Of course, Iago fulfils his purpose, and

Othello, like Lear, only realizes his truth after too much suffering. By the end of the play, the Moor has been made a complete fool; Iago has given him his own "coxcomb," so to speak, as Lear's boy once offered his to Kent.

In an excellent essay already mentioned, Glenys McMullen examines "some of the ways in which Shakespeare's fools combine satire and merry-making, so that they occupy a special place in both tragedy and comedy."[15] The Fool, a satirist of social evils whose only weapon is his tongue, was also expected to be an entertainer, an artist with special talents. He must also be what McMullen calls "a topsy-turvy scholar" to provide apt replies to any question put to him by other people. "He would always be applauded for turning an argument inside out."[16]

Hamlet, whom McMullen says to have proved "an apt pupil" of Yorick's, has assumed the dead fool's traditional function. The critic Harry Levin adds to this idea in saying that,

> in his (Yorick's) mortal absence, his former play-fellow wears the comic mask. . . . So Hamlet, at the court where he cannot be king, must perforce be the fool, an artificial fool pretending to be a natural.[17]

This is typical of Hamlet's scenes with Polonius, Rosencranz and Guildenstern, and even with the king himself. One of the best examples is Hamlet's speech about the diet of worms. In his supposed "show of madness," Hamlet greatly succeeds in making a fool of Claudius as he concludes that "a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar." (IV.iii.30-31)

In this discussion of the "anthropological" school of criticism, I have tried to concentrate on the critics' treatment of the fool as a satirical critic of society. More will be said about the fool in the section "Madness and Folly" of the next chapter.

1.3 - Statement of Purpose

This chapter has dealt with my aim in this dissertation and with the review of the critics' ideas. Madness in Shakespeare's tragedies is a very broad subject, but I hope I have succeeded in determining my area of interest. As it has been already suggested, I will be trying to show that Shakespeare followed no one specific model in his drawing of the mad characters, but that he developed each of them within very definite lines, differentiating one from all the others. To put it another way, what I am saying is that there is no fixed pattern in the madness of Shakespeare's heroes. They are all psychologically individualized.

The questions I will be trying to answer here have been raised by my reading of both Shakespeare's work and the critics' ideas. The traditional school of character-analysis has developed into the modern psychological school and they have studied the characters of the tragedies within very similar lines. This type of criticism suggests that each of the characters displays very individual characteristics, which determines his tragic flaw. This kind of analysis has led me to a discussion of madness as something which is also differentiated from play to play. Madmen in the tragedies are individualized beings who do not conform to one and the same model.

The historical and "anthropological" critics have analyzed carefully the various philosophical and sociological factors within the plays. Madness, being a kind of manifestation which occurs among the members of a society, has its important place as one of those factors. The critics' analyses have attracted my attention to the fact that the environments of the tragedies are but reflections of Elizabethan society, which is very important for the understanding of Shakespeare's mad characters. In relating this background of contemporary

theories to Dr. Laing's modern ideas, I hope I will be able to show how Shakespeare's view of madness transcended his own time.

It would be strange to talk about madness without any mention of the forms it can assume and the images associated with it. The "new" critics have helped me in this task with their treatment of the plays which concentrates mainly on aspects of language, structure and imagery. Each tragedy develops a different set of images to which madness can be associated: images of death, chaos, murder and blood; images of beasts and wild life; images of the supernatural, ghosts and witches; images of innocence, folly and disguse, and many others. If we compare this imagery to the madness of Shakespeare's characters, we will certainly find many relationships.

Before introducing the next chapter, however, it is desirable to briefly review Laing's ideas which I will later apply to the plays. Laing's existential-phenomenological approach " . . . attempts to characterize the nature of a person's experience of his world and himself . . ., to set all particular experiences within the context of his whole being-in-the-world."[18] In short, Laing's first purpose is to make madness, particularly schizophrenia, and the process of going mad comprehensible. In doing so, he defines a series of terms which will be used throughout this dissertation and which I will try to briefly summarize here.

The first of these concepts is that of "ontological insecurity." An ontologically insecure person is one who does not experience himself in the world as being real, alive, whole and continuous in a temporal sense. Such a person will hardly have a firm sense of his own and other people's reality and identity. He may feel more unreal than real, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question. And he may feel his "self" as partially divorced from his body.

Here, a second concept comes in, that of "unembodiment." The ontologically insecure person comes to experience himself as primarily split into a mind and a body, and he begins to identify too exclusively with the "unembodied" part. He feels that he has always been somewhat detached from his body, that he has never become quite incarnate. Instead of being the core of the individual's own being, the body is felt as the core of a "false self," and the true, "inner" self becomes a mere onlooker at all the body does.

The disintegration of the individual's real self keeps pace with the growing unreality of his false self until, in the extremes of mental breakdown, the whole personality disintegrates.

Laing says that there is a great distance between a sane, schizoid state and a psychotic one, and he affirms that the heroes of Shakespeare's tragedies never come to an irreversible state of psychosis, because their sense of personal identity fully contradicts their sense of evil. They are always able to recover from madness and, in the end, they are themselves again.

Another aspect of Laing's theory which is of great importance to/for this dissertation has to do with the idea of individual madness being but a symptom and a consequence of "social" madness. In other words, he is suggesting that the the individual is sick because society itself is sick.

Laing says that from birth we are taught how to become adjusted to the conventions of our social group. Those who do not conform to the mold are thought of as "out of formation" and, therefore, abnormal, bad or "mad." "But," Laing adds, "the formation itself may be bad or mad from the point of view of the ideal observer," and the individual who is said to be "out of formation" is them more "on course" than the formation itself. This idea is very important to my analysis of Shakespeare's tragedies.

I will be mentioning all these concepts and others related to them throughout this dissertation.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

[1]Norman Holland, The Shakespearean Imagination (Bloomington, Indiana and London: Indiana University Press, 1964), p. 45.

[2]A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1904), p. 97.

[3]G. Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire (London: Methuen & Co., 1930), p. 11.

[4]Ibid., pp. 184, 205.

[5]Ernest Jones, "Hamlet and Oedipus," Hamlet--Casebook Series: A Selection of Critical Essays, ed. John Jump (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1968), p. 52.

[6]S. A. Shapiro, "Othello's Desdemona," Literature and Psychology, XIV, no. 2 (Spring, 1964), 56.

[7]Ibid., p. 59.

[8]Sigmund Freud, "Some Character-types met with in Psychoanalytical Work," Macbeth--Casebook Series: A Selection of Critical Essays, ed. John Wain (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1968), p. 137.

[9]Alan Sinfield, "Lear and Laing," Essays in Criticism, XXVI no. 1 (January, 1976), 3.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid., p. 13.

[12]Enid Welsford, The Fool (London: Faber & Faber, 1935), p. 256.

[13]Quotations from the plays are taken from the New Swan Shakespeare edition of Macbeth and from the New Swan Shakespeare Advanced Series editions of Hamlet, Othello and King Lear. See Bibliography.

[14]William Empson, "Honest in Othello," Othello--Casebook Series: A Selection of Critical Essays, ed. John Wain (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1971), pp. 106-7.

[15]Glenys McMullen, "The Fool as Entertainer and Satirist," Dalhousie Review, 50 (Spring, 1970), 13.

[16]Ibid., p. 16.

[17]Harry Levin, "The Antic Disposition," Hamlet, Critical Essays, p. 133.

[18]R. D. Laing, The Divided Self (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1960), p. 17.

CHAPTER TWO

BACKGROUND OF CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY

2.1 - Madness in Shakespeare's Time

> In the Middle Ages and until the Renaissance, man's dispute with madness was a dramatic debate in which he confronted the secret powers of the world; the experience of madness was clouded by images of the Fall and the Will of God, of the Beast and the Metamorphosis, and of all the marvelous secrets of knowledge.[1]

This is how Michel Foucault summarizes the medieval and Renaissance experiences of madness in the preface to his book Madness and Civilization (1973). During the Middle Ages, madness had been seen as the manifestation either of God or of the Devil in the body of man. The Bible itself was filled with instances of possession by evil. People thus afflicted were supposed to have been seized by the Devil after a deliberate pact with him. The "witch-hunt" became a well-known by-product of this attitude in the Middle Ages. The cure of madness was a religious ritual with gesturing, incantation, prayer, exorcism and even scourging, which were used to relieve man from his sufferings. This belief still persisted in the Renaissance, though it was beginning to wane a little.

On the other hand, as an expression of the power of God, madness was also associated with inspiration. It has been said in the introduction of this dissertation that madness, poetry and love were all linked in the minds of Renaissance men. Poets and lovers were privileged people, and the madman enjoyed an association with them because of the divine quality of madness, inspired from above. Here also lies its relationship

with Folly, for both madman and fool share that same kind of insight which accounts for their "inspiration."

Towards the end of the medieval period, another method of treating madmen began to develop: exclusion. This custom had already been used during the Middle Ages as an effective way of dealing with lepers and other sick people. They were expelled from the cities and forbidden any social contact. As the dawn of the Renaissance approached, however, this kind of treatment was also assigned to poor vagabonds, criminals and madmen. Exclusion took many different forms which had the practical purpose of rendering the cities free from the inconvenient presence of their mad citizens. (Lear abandoned on the heath as a poor wretch is one of the many instances of exclusion that we find in Shakespeare.)

A delightful and yet horrible way of effecting exclusion was "embarkation." Madmen were put on a ship and entrusted to sailors, who were supposed to take them away. These were the famous Ships of Fools, a very common presence in the landscape of the Renaissance. One of the reasons for this practice was the belief, long established in the European mind, that water and madness had an affinity for each other; the sea was restless like the madman's mind, and its mysteries were compared to the deep labyrinths of his mad knowledge. Once put on a ship, the madman was not likely to return, but the embarkation presumably befitted him, because it was believed that water could cure and purify him. Some people thought, on the other hand, that an aquatic element was also present in madness, which caused the dark chaos of the madman's brain. Hence, the relationship between water and madness.

Shakespeare was certainly acquainted with such ideas, and there are clear references to them, for instance in Hamlet, when we hear Gertrude's account of Ophelia's drowning. It is

as if that "aquatic element" in the girl's madness sought for its like and thus drove her steps to the brook. The queen says that the girl sang

> As one incapable of her own distress,
> Or like a creature native and indued
> Unto that element. (IV.iii)

Some of the sailors in those ships of fools disembarked their "cargo" and "lost" them in great cities of commerce and travel, where the madmen would wander and beg for their lives. Others were sent to places of pilgrimage, thus uniting exclusion and interest in cure. As Foucault says, "madmen were confined in the holy locus of a miracle."[2] There was also the custom of whipping the demented publicly and chasing them out of town in a grotesque race. The practical, social importance of exclusion was obvious, but there was another reason for it which was highly symbolical and bore a more ritualistic significance. The madman, like the leper centuries before, was abandoned to be saved. The rites and formulas were still the same, implying social division but spiritual reintegration. However true and sincere this belief might be, it was certainly born as an excuse for the expulsion of the demented.

But it must not be believed that exclusion was the general rule concerning madmen. In some places they were admitted into hospitals and taken care of; but these were not, in general, special hospitals for the insane. The "madhouses" were not to become common till the beginning of the "age of reason." There were also, throughout Europe, gathering places reserved for the mentally ill. These were no more than prisons where they were lodged and fed, but which they were not allowed to leave. The madmen did not receive any kind of medical treatment in these places, and their maintenance was financed by the city funds.

During the medieval period and up to the second half of the fifteenth century, the theme of death had haunted the imagination of the Western man. In the early Renaissance madness replaces death and comes to the fore. It presents itself as a new, great spectacle to be watched on board the "ships of fools," in the public whipping sessions at market places, in prisons, hospitals, etc. Madness becomes a symbol of menace and mockery, as can be seen through Foucault's words:

> The end of man, the end of time, bear the face of pestilence and war. What overhangs human existence is this conclusion and this order from which nothing escapes. . . . Then, in the last years of the (fifteenth) century, this enormous uneasiness turns on itself; the mockery of madness replaces death and its solemnity.[3]

In its lunatic displays, madness expresses the nothingness of existence, and it must be shown and heralded to teach men that they are already dead, that madness is death in life. How characteristic it is that the mad Hamlet should come upon dead Yorick's skull in the graveyard scene! Even in death the court-fool keeps his job as a reminder of the ambiguity latent in the madness-folly relationship.

In Shakespeare's tragedies, madness is always related to death and murder. The playwright's treatment of the theme, however, applies more to the dark and tragic experience of madness of the fifteenth century than to the critical and moral approach to unreason which was soon to abolish the previous views and which developed in his own epoch. For instance, in the latter years of the sixteenth century, "the social madness of demonology began to wane and was replaced by a different perception of the disturbed."[4] In King Lear, however, Edgar's use of the medieval fiends still testifies to that tragic experience of unreason of the fifteenth and previous centuries.

Foucault very well remarks that the experience of madness in literature and art seems to have been extremely coherent,

but that there was no continuity in such themes. Indeed, in the early years of the Renaissance, word and image begin to dissociate in their treatment of insanity, and the Gothic symbols of the Middle Ages, once so rich in spiritual significance, now become images of madness. In these fantastic figures of nightmare, the concepts of animality, long established in the medieval mind, are now reversed. The beast is set free from the moral and mystic world of legend that it had inhabited in the Middle Ages. It becomes the secret nature of man. "Animality has escaped domestication by human symbols and values; and it is animality that reveals the dark rage, the sterile madness that lie in men's hearts."[5]

Thus the madman was compared to animals and beasts, the lowest forms of creation. He was "the thing itself," as Lear most properly named the disguised Edgar. It is the animal that exists in the madman that reveals to man his own truth and inaccessible limits of knowledge that only the Fool, in his innocent idiocy, already possesses. This is where madness and folly coincide: both madman and fool share that forbidden kind of knowledge enclosed within itself, like a crystal ball which they proudly hold as the prize of their insight. Madness and folly had been linked since the old morality plays of the Middle Ages, where they represented Vice. All of a sudden, in the fifteenth century, they acquire a new royalty; they become the measure of knowledge, the criticism and grotesque punishment of a disordered and false learning. The madman and the fool remind each man of his own truth, "whatever truth about himself he is able to perceive."[6]

Madness in the Renaissance was treated in a way which would not be repeated in any other period. The Neo-Classical Age's experience of madness was to be radically different and would open the way for our modern theories. But, in Shakespeare's time, madness was still laughed at and scorned,

respected and praised; it was linked to folly and vice, to dreams and illusions, to tragedy and comedy. Madness was life and death, satirist and truth-teller, morality and sin. It enjoyed imaginary freedom and was allowed to flourish in philosophy, literature and art. To quote Michel Foucault once more, it was "present everywhere and mingled with every experience by its images and dangers."[7]

2.2 - Madness and Cosmology

The student who undertakes to read one of the great tragedies of Shakespeare for the first time, is perhaps most impressed by the significant number of images and figures of speech that he finds there: metaphors, comparisons, personifications, and so on--all abound in Shakespeare's language. Indeed, Shakespeare's imagery is one of the first things that strike us in his plays: imagery and its expression through poetry. If that student is reading Macbeth, for example, he will certainly not fail to notice images of fear, sleep and darkness, images of the supernatural and of bloody action in a chaotic world. On a first reading of King Lear, he will be impressed by a more naturalistic set of images: comparisons of man with beasts, references to superstitious country-life, to astronomy, atmospheric disorder and to madness. Impressed as he may be, however, that student will hardly be aware, in his first reading, of the whole body of philosophical theories hidden behind each word. Indeed, the thinking of Shakespeare's time is clearly mirrored in the language of the tragedies, specifically, the thinking about nature and order of the universe. It is this "world-picture" that I intend to describe in this section.

a. The Order of the Universe

The Elizabethans believed in what is called "the great chain of being." The origin of this belief was deeply rooted

in the Greek philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, to which elements of the Hebrew and Christian doctrines were added. Medieval studies of natural history also helped to reinforce the idea of the "chain," which was inherited by the Renaissance and survived as late as the eighteenth century. The theory current in the Middle Ages, however, passed only in general lines into the age of Elizabeth; it was a simplified version of what had been a much more complicated medieval view. But Professor Tillyard says that "the greatness of the Elizabethan age was that it contained so much of new without bursting the noble form of the old order."[8] Tillyard's book is the basic source of this section.

The idea of the great chain of being is that of a world hierarchically ordered, where each single created thing has its fixed place. The chain began with God at the top, who created the universe, and down it came through all creation till the last and lowest stone at the bottom. Other representations of the same order were a set of corresponding planes, and the image of a dance. The first analogy "consisted of a number of planes, arranged one below another in order of dignity, but connected by an immense net of correspondences."[9] Each plane was named after the part of creation that it represented. Thus, there was the "divine and angelic"; the universe, or macrocosm; the commonwealth, or "body politic"; man or microcosm, and the lower creation. Together with the chain of being, the corresponding planes served as evidence for the Elizabethan man that every detail of creation was part of God's plan. This was also the function of the second alternative picture, the dance. The general belief was that the created universe was in a state of music, of perpetual dance. The act of creation itself had been, in the conception of the Renaissance, an act of music, and the dance to music

was repeated on the different levels of existence. This universal dance suggested not only the notion of order, but also that this order was harmonic in its perpetual musical movement.

As it has already been said, the chain of being established a hierarchical order from God and His angels down to the animals, plants and minerals. Beginning at the bottom, it was thus constituted: first the inanimate class, including the elements, liquids and metals. These have only the quality of existence in space and time. Immediately above this, comes the vegetative class, to which all plants belong. Besides mere existence, this class also has the quality of growth. Thirdly there is the order of animals, which is mainly sensitive. Above the beasts there is man with life, feeling and understanding, which differentiates him from the preceeding class. Here, too, we have a hierarchy of order, mainly political order: the Emperor or King at the top, followed by the orders of nobility, ecclesiastic orders, etc., down to the fool, the beggar, and the madman, who are the lowest forms of human life. Next in the line upwards comes the purely rational or spiritual class, that of the angels. There are nine orders of angels, each in charge of a particular heavenly or astronomical sphere of the universe. Above the angels there is only the pure being, God.

It must be remembered that all this scheme was based upon the Ptolomaic astronomy, where it was said that the earth stood still at the center of the universe and everything else moved around it. As for its composition, it was believed that the whole universe was made out of four basic elements: fire, air, water and earth. Here is a summary of what Tillyard says about the four elements on page 79 of his book. They were founded on the notions of hot and cold, dry and moist, and had their almost ceremonial places in the great world order. Earth was cold and dry, the lowest and heaviest of the elements.

Nobler than earth was water, which was cold and moist. Air was hot and moist, the peculiar region of the devils, who took their form from it. Fire was the noblest of all, hot and dry, and invisible to human sight. Above the sphere of the moon these elements were perfectly mixed into what was called "ether." Therefore, the heavens were eternal and unchanging. Below the moon, however, the mixture of the four elements was infinitely varied but not perfect, which made the "sublunary" regions subject to change and decay. This was the difference between mutability and constancy.

The threat of mutability obsessed the Elizabethans, because it implied chaos. Indeed, if they believed that the chain of being expressed unity, order and hierarchy, the negative implication of this belief was that order could be upset whenever someone or something broke the links of the chain. Then "chaos is come again" as in Othello, and the whole universe is thrown into a state of confusion. The first of these mutinies had been Lucifer's rebellion against God; the second, Adam's sin in Paradise.

In short, the "great chain of being" describes a tidy, finite universe, and it represents a belief in the rightness of order. Whatever disturbs this order is wrong, against nature's plan. In his tragedies, Shakespeare has his characters shake this universal harmony and bring chaos into the world. The restoration of order comes at the end, but not until much suffering and destruction has been brought about.

b. The Theory of the Humours

What I choose to call "the theory of the humours" is intimately linked to the chain of being. It has been said that man, the central figure of the chain, binding together all creation, was seen as a microcosm. Professor Campbell, on whose book I have based the present description, makes a good

summary of this: "man is thought of as a little world, comprising in himself all the elements that go to the making of the great world."[10]

Thus, the four basic elements already discussed also compounded man's frame, entering his body in the form of food. It is not the purpose of this section to follow step by step the process of human metabolism as it was described by Elizabethan physicians. What is important here is that the four elements were converted into four liquid substances, the "humours." They were: choler, blood, phlegm and melancholy, or "black bile." Each of them corresponded to one of the four elements, sharing their particular properties as to the notions of hot and cold, moist and dry. The humours were responsible for man's health, for (as was the case with the macrocosm) when anything went wrong, chaos was brought about. Chaos, in this case, was any disease, physical or mental, that might affect man. The humours also determined human temperament. It was the predominant humour in a person that defined his character. Accordingly, there were four basic personality types: the choleric man, the sanguine, the phelgmatic, and the melancholy. These correspondences can be better visualized in a table.

ELEMENT	PROPERTIES	HUMOUR	TEMPERAMENT
Fire	hot and dry	choler	choleric
Air	hot and moist	blood	sanguine
Water	cold and moist	phlegm	phelgmatic
Earth	cold and dry	melancholy	melancholy

These were the "normal" temperaments, determined by the "natural" humours. But, the humours were also susceptible to abnormal changes and conditions. Thus they became unnatural and caused much discomfort to the person's body and soul. The

worst of these possibilities occurred when a humour was "burnt" by excessive heat and became "adust." Any humour could undergo this process and its result was the "unnatural melancholy humour," or "melancholy adust," as it was better known. Two humours were more likely to become adust: choler and melancholy. In the case of choler, the person was open to unreason, and madness generally ensued. However, when the heat that caused "adustion" was extinct, madness gave way to folly, rendering the man forgetful and dull.

The natural, melancholy humour was very different from melancholy adust. The first was, as we have seen, cold and dry, and the man who was melancholy by temperament was generally sorrowful, dark and lacked imagination. Melancholy adust, on the other hand, was of various temperatures and made man exceedingly wise. He might lack memory, but his wit was unsurpassed because he could see everything with astonishing clearness--he could see "through" things.

It is certainly obvious that these personality types fit perfectly well into Shakespeare's tragic heroes, especially Hamlet and Lear: the first, unnaturally melancholy with grief; the second, choleric by temperament and overcome by madness. Othello's jealousy and Macbeth's ambition could also be defined in terms of humour psychology, but to apply such terms fully is not the primary purpose of this dissertation. Professor Campbell successfully undertook this task in Slaves of Passion.

Thus, sanity was associated with the proper balance of the humours in a person's body, whereas insanity meant either imbalance of the humours, or the abnormal and sudden change of one of them. This can be seen as providing the Renaissance with a primitive psychological and chemical explanation of madness, besides the supernatural one inherited from the Middle Ages.

c. Madness and Chaos

Now that the Renaissance ideas about cosmology have been briefly summarized, a few questions about madness are still necessary. Is madness cause or consequence of the world's chaos? If cause, can the madman be said to be a seer? If consequence, what then caused disorder in the first place? And why was one and just that person chosen to be mad? How does Shakespeare deal with this problem in the tragedies? These are the questions I will be raising here. As I see the problem, however, madness was no more than one of the forms that chaos could assume in the Renaissance, a miniature of what might happen at a universal level, as man was a miniature of the universe (microcosm-macrocosm).

We have seen that the Elizabethans believed in a perfectly divided and ordered universe, and that they desperately feared any disruption of this order. Chaos was therefore an abnormality, a threat to be avoided at all costs. It has also been said that madness occupied a very special place in the imagination of the Renaissance. The madman was the lowest form of human life, well down in the chain of being; immediately below him were animals and beasts, to which he was compared. But his neighbour on a superior level was the Fool, with whom he shared a mysterious knowledge, acquired through their instinctive, animal side. Yes, the madman may be said to be a seer, but, still better, he was a "pointer", one who reminded other men of the brevity of existence and of their insignificance before the secrets of nature. He was seen as one of the visible tokens of disorder which dismayed and terrified the Elizabethans; he was a live, walking instance of universal chaos. Shakespeare's contemporaries were terribly concerned with the idea of "chaos in the state"; History may prove that they had their motives to fear political disorder. Anyway, this

obsession is clearly seen in Shakespeare's tragedies. Chaos in Hamlet, for instance, begins with Claudius' crime--both regicide and fratricide--and with his incestuous marriage to the queen. The ghost portends chaos in the macrocosm, as Hamlet's madness is its representation in the microcosm. Macbeth is certainly the tragedy where chaos is most visible, huge and terrible. Macbeth's crime unseats the whole universe of the play from its proper order. An important proof that madness and chaos do not always have a direct "cause-consequence" relationship is that here, where chaos is most visible and awful, madness is not so grand and spectacular as it is in King Lear and Hamlet.

Therefore, chaos in the tragedies is as extreme and beyond appeal as madness itself; they reflect and echo each other, as two reciprocal phenomena which remind men of the nothingness of existence and of the consequences of sin.

2.3 - Madness and Folly

a. Madmen and Fools

Madness and folly had always been linked in the minds of medieval and Renaissance men. Much has already been said about the former; now we must turn more attentively to the latter. By the time Shakespeare started his work, and even long before that, Folly was a recognized institution throughout Europe. England, and mainly Elizabethan England, seems to have entered the cult of Folly more than any other European country. In the various holidays and festivals then celebrated there were dances, plays, mock-ceremonies and other pastimes where the "Lord of Misrule" led his court through the streets of town.

Of course the Fool occupied an important position in these festivals. His function had been born in the early theatrical clowning of the Middle Ages where the clown stood as one

among the vices. In the Renaissance, however, he comes to the fore: "Folly now leads the joyous throng of all human weaknesses."[11] All this "Saturnalian pattern," as C. L. Barber calls it, formed the source of Shakespeare's festive comedies.[12] But it is not the purpose of this thesis to enter the world of the comedies; so we had better turn back to the tragedies.

When the clown of the comedies becomes the court-fool of the tragedies, he uses his folly as a pretext for social criticism; his witty commentaries are expressed through the powerful weapon which is his tongue. The Fool is no longer a mere participant in the town's festivities. Now he is hired under a master in whose household he is kept to amuse and entertain. Usually, however, behind a pretence of innocence, the Fool's witty remarks would always hide a sparkle of truth, some intelligent criticism of society or a sincere piece of advice.

The Dutch humanist Erasmus was the first to express these ideas in his satire Encomium Moriae (The Praise of Folly) which he wrote in 1509 at the suggestion of Sir Thomas More. It was mainly directed against theologians and Church dignitaries. In The Praise of Folly, Erasmus plays upon the various meanings and relations of the words "fool," "knave," and "wisdom." He emphasizes their ambiguity and delights in the notions of "the wise fool" and "the foolish wiseman."[13] Folly is the opposite of wisdom, and it is the fool's function to turn things upside down, so that his words, "coming out of a wiseman's mouth were an hanging matter, the same yet spoken by a fool shall much delight even him that is touched therewith."[14]

The Fool, belonging to the lowest social class, is able to criticize the evils of society without offence, because he is only a fool and nobody will take him seriously. Yet, his satire is expressed with so much wit and innocence that he is able to turn others into fools without their noticing it. This

is where an inversion of meanings takes place and the roles are exchanged between the wise fool and the foolish wiseman. Thus, although he was not, as a rule, believed, the Fool worked as a reminder of the folly latent in every man, even in the king himself (as in King Lear).

It is here that the Fool is akin to the madman. MacMullen says in her essay that the crazy logic of the Fool,

> associated as it is with obsessive images, brings the fools close to the madmen. . . . Both express tangential thoughts in staccato phrases, flashing truth through the sudden juxtaposition of ideas. It is exciting for an audience, and produces a restless feeling, even an uneasy sense that the table of sanity is turning.[15]

Both fool and madman are the guardians of truth; the former as a kind of chorus, one who warns, criticizes and confounds. The madman, on the other hand, can be said to be the embodiment of the fool's words. He reminds each man of his own truth, but not through satirical commentaries or logic-games. His mere presence is enough, because he is a living example of man's misfortunes. It is very significant, for instance, in King Lear, that the first manifestation of Lear's madness should come as he catches sight of "mad Tom." (III,iv)

This close acquaintance between madness and folly can also be seen in other tragedies besides King Lear. The fool at Elsinore has been dead for twenty-three years when Hamlet comes to find his skull in the graveyard scene. Yorick's skull in Hamlet's hand symbolizes the Fool's coxcomb and the function Hamlet has assumed in his pretended madness. As for Othello, it has been said that Iago is the only character in this tragedy who deserves to be called "intelligent." Indeed, he makes fools of almost everybody with whom he comes to be acquainted. The critic W. H. Auden has pointed out that "what Shakespeare gives us in Iago is a portrait of a "practical joker,"[16] one who plays tricks on others to make them look

foolish. We must not forget, however, that Iago's sharp wit and cynicism, which account for his thorough Machiavellian rationalism, seem to show that to be too rational can also be a kind of madness.

Thus we can see that the link between madness and folly was a strong one in the Renaissance. Either because of their neighboring positions in the chain of being, or because they played similar functions in society (or maybe both), the madman and the fool had always been seen as kinsmen, two cousins, so to speak, of the old medieval vices.

b. The Grotesque in Madness

We have just seen that madmen and fools were intimately related in the minds of Elizabethan men. Now, the element that unites madness and folly--grotesqueness--will be here examined. Michel Foucault says that even at the end of the Middle Ages,

> madness and the madman become major figures in their ambiguity: menace and mockery, the dizzying unreason of the world and the feeble ridicule of men.[17]

Indeed, during that period and on into the Renaissance, madness represented a dualism never resolved. It symbolized both the nothingness of existence (menace), and the comic, the ridiculous side of man (mockery). As "menace," madness was related to apocalyptic images; it was the "déjà-là" of death. As a symbol of "mockery," on the other hand, it was associated with folly and its grotesque forms.

Grotesqueness and mockery have always been acknowledged as characteristic of comedy and not of tragedy. C. L. Barber says that the pattern of comedy, the Saturnalian pattern,

> appears in many variations, all of which involve inversion, statement and counterstatement, and a basic movement which can be summarized in the formula, through release to clarification.[18]

In other words, comedy always resolves the dualism of its plot through a process where the positive and negative poles

are united in laughter. It is usually part of the Fool's function to carry out this process. Nevertheless, Professor Knight tells us that,

> a shifting flash of comedy across the pain of the purely tragic both increases the tension and suggests, vaguely, a resolution and purification. The comic and the tragic rest both on the idea of incompatibilities.[19]

Therefore, both comedy and tragedy share this peculiar kind of dualism where incongruities abound. But whereas they are resolved through laughter in the former, they can only bring suffering and death in the latter. With this reasoning, Knight undertakes to analyse "the fantastic comedy of King Lear." Lear's madness is the greatest incongruity to be found in this play, and the Fool is the first to see the potential humour of the situation. He works as that element of resolution through whose operation pain could be changed into laughter and thus eliminated. But Lear cannot listen to him; in the deep agony of his despair, he cannot listen to the voice of humour which, Knight says, might have saved him.

The grotesque element in King Lear borders on the cruel, the satanic, and the ghoulish. In Hamlet, on the other hand, this grotesque quality is much more emphasized in its ridiculous than in its terrible aspect. Ophelia's description of Hamlet to her father (II.i) reminds us, for instance, of the ridiculous figure of Malvolio in Twelfth Night. Othello, too, becomes grotesque, and even ridiculous, in his ravings (IV.i). We feel sorry for his being so much fooled, but we cannot help noticing the cruel absurdity of the situation.

On the whole, as we have seen, the grotesque element present in madness is also intimately related to Folly. To this relationship we owe its appearance both in comedy and tragedy. But the light mood of happiness and mockery conferred by this grotesque element of comedy, sharply contrasts with the deep

poignancy that it lends to tragedy. Only a man of Shakespeare's genius could have worked such themes out with so much mastery.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

[1]Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), p. xii.

[2]Ibid., p. 10.

[3]Ibid., p. 15.

[4]Elton B. McNeil, The Psychoses (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1970), p. 8.

[5]Foucault, op. cit., p. 21.

[6]Ibid., p. 27.

[7]Ibid., p. 70.

[8]E. M. W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1966), p. 17.

[9]Ibid., p. 103.

[10]Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes: Slaves of Passion (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1930), p. 52; hereafter, Slaves of Passion.

[11]Foucault, op. cit., p. 24.

[12]C. L. Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy (Cleveland, Ohio: Meridian Books, 1959), p. 4.

[13]See Chapter One, the "anthropological" critics.

[14]Erasmus, The Praise of Folly, quoted by Glenys McMullen, op. cit., p. 13.

[15]McMullen, op. cit., p. 16.

[16]W. H. Auden, "The Joker in the Pack," Othello: Critical Essays, p. 205.

[17]Foucault, op. cit., p. 13.

[18]Barber, op. cit., p. 4.

[19]G. Wilson Knight, "The Comedy of the Grotesque," King Lear--Casebook Series: A Selection of Critical Essays, ed. Frank Kermode (London: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1969), p. 118.

CHAPTER THREE

HAMLET

In The Shakespearean Imagination, Norman Holland opens his chapter on Hamlet as follows: "There are four subjects on which more books are written than anything else in the world--or so have I heard, and do in part believe it. The first three are: Christ, Napoleon, and Shakespeare; the fourth is Hamlet."[1] Indeed, no other play seems to have been as fully discussed or frequently acted. Hamlet is by far the most popular of Shakespeare's tragedies. It is believed that the play was written between 1598 and 1602, when it was registered in the Stationer's Company in London. The year 1601 is the most accepted date for the first production of Hamlet. The story is found in the folk literature of Iceland, Ireland and Denmark, but a collection of these legends was not printed in England until 1608. Shakespeare must have gotten his material either from the French translation of this work, or from an earlier play of Hamlet, which is now lost.

Hamlet is the story of a prince of Denmark who comes back to his land after his father's death and finds the throne already occupied by his uncle, who has married the widow-queen. Hamlet mourns his dead father and is shocked at the idea that his mother has been able to forget her late husband so quickly. The ghost of Hamlet's father appears to him and reveals that he had been murdered by his own brother. He urges Hamlet to punish the murderer, but to spare Gertrude. Hamlet swears to take his revenge "with wings as swift as

meditation or the thoughts of love" and he decides "to put an antic disposition on" in order to fulfill his task.

Claudius and the queen, very worried about Hamlet's strange behaviour, welcome his friends Rosencranz and Guildenstern to Elsinore and ask them to try to find out the cause of Hamlet's distraction. Hamlet, however, confounds them as easily as he does Polonius, the king's prime counselor who thinks that the cause of Hamlet's lunacy is his frustrated love for Ophelia, Polonius' daughter. Ophelia also helps her father and Claudius to discover the cause of Hamlet's behaviour, but he acts and speaks very crudely to her, and the girl can but lament, "O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown." However, Claudius is now convinced that Hamlet is not a distracted lover and that his presence in Denmark is dangerous.

Hamlet, on the other hand, decides to take advantage of the presence of a company of players in the castle, and arranges for them to perform a play containing a murder very similar to that of his own father. Hamlet wants to test the ghost's words in order to be sure of Claudius' guilt. Perturbed by the play, the king rises during the presentation and leaves the room precipitously. He decides to embark Hamlet immediately to England with Rosencranz and Guildenstern, who will bear sealed orders calling for Hamlet's death as soon as he gets there.

Meanwhile, Hamlet goes to an interview with his mother, who has allowed Polonius to eavesdrop on their talk. Polonius hides behind an arras and is killed by Hamlet, who feigns a fit of madness. Then he entreats his mother to abandon her incestuous relationship with Claudius, and the ghost appears once more, reminding Hamlet not to include Gertrude in his revenge. She cannot see the ghost to whom Hamlet talks, and thinks that her son is truly mad. Claudius, informed by the

queen of Hamlet's deed, sees in it a good pretext for sending Hamlet away, to which the prince passively submits.

Laertes, Polonius' son who has been in France, comes back at the news of his father's death and finds out that his sister has gone mad for that same reason; afterwards, she drowns herself in a brook. At her burial, Hamlet reappears. He had arranged for Rosencranz and Guildenstern to be killed in England, and came back to Denmark with the help of some pirates. Laertes attacks him in the graveyard, but they are parted by some attendants, and Hamlet leaves announcing madly his own love for Ophelia.

The king convinces Laertes that Hamlet has to be killed and they decide to stage the murder by engaging Hamlet in a fencing match. Laertes' foil will have its point unguarded and envenomed, and a cup of poisoned wine will also be at hand. They trust that Hamlet, not suspecting any villainy, will not examine the foils. The match is proposed and Hamlet accepts it. This is the last scene of the play. Hamlet and Laertes wound each other with the same weapon (which they accidentally exchange): the poison is already in their blood. The queen drinks of the poisoned cup and dies. Hamlet, being informed by the dying Laertes that "the king is to blame," finally kills Claudius and also dies.

Critics have frequently discussed the character of Hamlet, his duty to revenge his father's death, the nature of his delay, and the peculiar situation where we see him placed. The richness of Hamlet's character as Shakespeare has depicted it has always accounted for the particular difficulties critics have had in answering the major questions. The best known theories about Hamlet's problem are those of the traditional critics, who have always explained the hero's irresolution on the basis of his excessive intellectual activity. For Hazlitt,

Hamlet's powers of action have been eaten up by thought, and Coleridge also emphasizes the prince's intellectual activity as opposed to his aversion to real action. Bradley's more recent ideas do not disclaim such views, but add to them the importance of Hamlet's profound melancholy and his feeling of "disgust at life and everything in it, himself included." Such a feeling, Bradley says, is "adverse to any kind of action."[2]

However, my main concern here is Hamlet's madness. As it has been suggested in the first chapter of this dissertation, I will try to focus on the problem of madness by means of an analysis based on R. D. Laing's modern approach. Thus, I hope to emphasize Hamlet's peculiar and individual kind of madness. The biggest question asked about Hamlet's madness is "Is Hamlet really mad, or does he just pretend a derangement that he is far from experiencing?" In other words, does he use his madness as a mask for his plan of revenge, or as a veiled way of criticizing society? As Hamlet's character is rich and complex, so his madness is also not one thing among many, but rather a mixture of various different factors. It can indeed be seen as a mask for a plan, a "stalking-horse," so to speak. Hamlet himself seems to admit this when he proposes the oath after the "ghost scene."

> As I, perchance, hereafter shall think it meet
> To put an antic disposition on--
> (I.v.171-72)

Thus Hamlet decides to feign madness, and he actually does so, as we are told by Ophelia in the opening scene of act II. She reports to her father the strange way in which the prince has come before her in her closet, "as if he had been loosed out of hell to speak of horrors." (II.i.82-83) Polonius, worried about his daughter, believes that Hamlet is mad for her love, and goes to the king and the queen with this discovery. Claudius, however, is not convinced; he doubts

that Hamlet's distraction has so simple a cause as love. Maybe he has guessed, in the deepest part of his soul, the true cause of his nephew's madness. Gertrude, worried about the moral implications of her marriage to Claudius, relates Hamlet's problem to this fact. It is indeed very interesting to note that everyone has a self-centered explanation for Hamlet's madness, depending on each person's individual preoccupations. And if we examine each case carefully, we shall see that none of them is completely wrong.

However, while they try to find out the "cause of this defect," Hamlet wanders in the court, watching them carefully like a witty observer. He tests them to see their reactions; he scandalizes and tortures them; he makes them tremble and look foolish. In a sense, this "madness" allows that same license the Fool used to have in the court. I have already mentioned the similarities between madmen and fools in my previous chapter.[3] As Hamlet "puts on" his antic disposition, he also wears the fool's coxcomb, or the comic mask.

All this "wearing" and "putting on" suggests a rich imagery of clothing, which is recurrent and important in this play. Hamlet's madness is associated with a mask which can be assumed or taken off whenever it is necessary. And this is a peculiarity with Hamlet's case, for madness is usually "unmasking"--as in King Lear, for instance, where the old man is deprived of everything, including his clothes. "Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton here." (King Lear, III.iv) Madness as "unmasking" also happens to Ophelia, for the girl's derangement allows her to "take off" the cloak of court conventions and inhibitions, and thus talk about things which she would never dare mention before (images of love and sex which appear in the ballads she sings). But Hamlet's madness is not unmasking; it works as a disguise.

Thus, Hamlet assumes his pretence and, in his new position, becomes a critic of society--a bitter one--who utters judgements that would be forbidden had he not been "mad." In The Question of Hamlet, Harry Levin says that

> When Hamlet, after playing hide-and-seek, is captured and brought in attended by guards, his self-humiliation seems complete. . . . But we should not forget that he is stooping to folly in the grand Erasmian manner, and that self-criticism is a premise which enables him to criticize others.[4]

The mad prince becomes the "wise fool" who, by making himself ridiculous, is able to criticize openly those "foolish wisemen," Claudius and Polonius.

Therefore, Hamlet's madness is--or at least seems to be--a mask for his plan of revenge, a "stalking-horse," which he uses as a tool in his criticism of society. But, as a coin has two sides, so Hamlet's pretence also manifests two facets. It does function as a disguise in the situations just mentioned, but before Hamlet decides to assume it, even as the play opens, we already find him in a very strange state of mind. He is said to have always been introspective, given to reading and lacking exercise. His excessive concern with his father's death and his mother's second marriage, drives Hamlet to the dangerous verge between madness and sanity. Moreover, the ghost's revelation brings Hamlet to such a state of mind which, if not madness itself, is very close to it; one can never be sure whether he is really mad or just pretending. Of course, when he is with Horatio, his speech is sound and coherent and he looks quite sane. But his soliloquies are so deeply rooted in sorrow and grief, so obsessively concerned with fixed ideas, that one certainly doubts his sanity.

Hamlet is primarily concerned with his "nausea" with sex and women, which springs from the cruel deception he had with his mother. "Frailty, thy name is woman! . . . O God! a

beast, that wants discourse of reason, Would have mourned longer." (I.ii) Hamlet's treatment of Ophelia also reflects his disgust with Gertrude. He delays in examining the girl's face as if to discover traces of his mother's frailty in it. Later, in the "nunnery scene," he openly insults her: ". . . wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery, go, and quickly too." (III.i.138-40)

Hamlet's concern with obsessive images of sex, death, and suicide seems to be a consequence of that peculiar attitude of his to which Coleridge calls our special attention. "Hamlet's mind," the critic says, "is constantly occupied with the world within, and abstracted from the world without."[5] His perception of real objects and real actions is greatly dimmed by this tendency to be excessively dominated by thought. Hamlet himself seems to realize this in his most famous soliloquy.

> Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
> And thus the native hue of resolution
> Is sicklied over with the pale cast of thought.
> (III.i.83-85)

It is not surprising that a man who is mainly preoccupied with the mental and sensitive parts of his being should think so earnestly about suicide. Hamlet suffers more in the mind than in the body, which he wishes "would melt, thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!" (I.ii.129-30)

Coleridge says that the necessary balance "between our attention to the objects of our senses, and our meditation on the workings of our minds" is, in Hamlet, clearly disturbed. Hamlet's perceptions of the real world pass through his senses greatly altered by this imbalance, and he "loses the power of action in the energy to resolve."[6] This kind of "procrastination" is very peculiar with Hamlet. He lingers upon thoughts and generalizations, giving to intellectual activity much more importance than to actual deeds.

Whenever Hamlet performs an action, it usually forced upon him by accidental circumstances or by an outburst of passion. This is so, for instance, when he kills Polonius--"How now! A rat? Dead for a ducat, dead!" (III.iv) The same happens again at Ophelia's burial, when Hamlet advances from his hiding-place, fearless of Laertes' reaction--". . . This is I, Hamlet, the Dane." (V.i) Also, in his sea-adventure with the pirates, Hamlet is impelled to act without having time to think. ". . . and in the grapple I boarded them." (IV.vi.15)

This is, for Coleridge, the very peculiarity of Hamlet's madness and the cause of his delay--Hamlet grows all "head"; his thoughts are disconnected from his feelings and ability to act.

It is interesting to see how fitly Coleridge's ideas apply to, and are complemented by R. D. Laing's modern theories about split personality, ontological insecurity, "embodiment" and "unembodiment," etc. Here it will be helpful to open a parenthesis to reinforce some of these ideas.

As it has already been suggested, Laing's work offers a rich existential analysis of personal alienation. In The Divided Self, Laing says that his purpose is "to show that there is a comprehensible transition from the sane schizoid way of being-in-the-world to a psychotic way of being-in-the-world."[7] As he sees the problem, the mentally sick individual is an outsider, estranged from himself and society, and cannot experience either himself or others as "real." This is what Laing calls a problem of "ontological insecurity."

> A man may have a sense of his presence in the world as a real, alive, whole, and, in a temporal sense, a continuous person. As such he can live out into the world and meet others: a world and others experienced as equally real, alive, whole, and continuous.[8]

Such a person, Laing says, is "basically ontologically secure." In the opposite situation, an ontologically insecure

person will try to devise a defense mechanism to protect himself, for his "living out into the world" and his "meeting others" will be basically threatening to his "self." Therefore, he will invent a "false self," or a "false-self system," with which he can confront both the outside world and his own despair. This happens by means of a process of disintegration. The person feels his real self to be "more or less unembodied"; he feels out of his body, which them becomes the core of a "false self."[9]

Shakespeare's heroes, Laing says, are never truly psychotic, for they "evidently experience themselves as real and alive and complete."[10] Indeed, it is so, but their "sane schizoid" condition is drawn so near the psychotic type--especially in the middle of the plays--that one cannot always realize the difference. Hamlet is a good example of this.

We can say that Hamlet displays traits of "self-division" right from the beginning of the play. The true self "is never revealed directly in the individual's expressions and actions" and, as a consequence, "the direct and immediate transactions between the individual, the other, and the world, . . . all come to be meaningless, futile, and false."[11] Which better testimony to this fact can we find in Hamlet, than his own words in the first soliloquy?

> How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable
> Seem to me all the uses of this world!
>
> (I.ii.133-37)

Hamlet's heart is divided between opposite feelings, as his own self comes to be.

Immediately after the ghost's revelation, Hamlet knows exactly what he has to do.

> Remember thee!
> . . . thy commandment all alone shall live
> within the book and memory of my brain,
> unmixed with baser matter.
>
> (I.v.97-104)

He knows his course, and yet he delays. Maybe Laing's ideas can account for this when he says that "there is something final and definite about an act, which this type of person regards with suspicion." The schizoid individual, in Laing's words, "abhors action."[12] Hegel's characterization of an act, quoted in The Divided Self, implies that an individual is what his act is, and "in the simple fact that the act is, the individual is for others what he really is."[13] This the schizoid person must avoid at all costs, for revealing himself to others as he is (in his own, true self) means exposing himself to desdestruction. He must keep his "self" from any kind of contact with the world, and this is why he creates a "false self." "He wishes to remain perpetually uncommitted," Laing says.[14] This is precisely the case with Hamlet. He refrains from action and develops a false self, like the antic disposition he puts on. Thus he is able to keep his true, "inner" self unknown and untouched by others.

As a result of his splitting into a true and a false self, the schizoid person can only exist in perpetual isolation, which is the self's effort to preserve itself. Obviously, Hamlet isolates himself from other people in the play; the only two persons who come into contact with Hamlet's true self are Horatio and the queen. Hamlet sees Horatio as a just man who is not "a pipe for Fortune's fingers" (III.ii) and, therefore, not a slave of passion (as Hamlet himself is). Horatio can thus be seen as a part of Hamlet's own self (perhaps an echo of the "double-man theory"[15]), to whom he must be true.

But whereas Hamlet's attitude towards Horatio never changes throughout the play, it is only in the closet scene that he can finally be true to his mother. He confesses that his recent, strange behaviour is but the result of cunning, and asks her not to reveal it to Claudius. He trusts her because he has seen the effect of his words on her, and also

because she is, after all, his mother and can, as such, be also seen as a part of Hamlet's "self."

In this scene we have the third and last appearance of the ghost. It comes in precisely at the moment when Hamlet becomes more incensed in his torture of Gertrude. Three times she asks him "no more," but Hamlet cannot stop directing his rash words at her. In the beginning of the play, the ghost had told Hamlet to spare the queen from his revenge. Now, the spirit comes in once more with the same request: "Step between her and her fighting soul." (III.iv.113-14) The ghost may not want Hamlet to take any action against his (Hamlet's) own mother, which would be a more unnatural deed than Claudius'. Moreover, we can also infer this from the fact that when the ghost talks about adultery and incest, he refers only to Claudius, mentioning Gertrude as a victim of the villain's seduction.

> Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
> With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts--
> O wicked wit and gifts that have the power
> So to seduce!--won to his shameful lust
> The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen.
> (I.v.42-46)

The Ghost of Hamlet's father is not primarily concerned with images of sex and incest as Hamlet himself is. The spirit's main concern is revenge. Shakespeare's audience would accept this ghost at once; Elizabethans really believed in such things. There were three different contemporary theories on the subject, briefly summarized by Professor Campbell:

> Either the strange appearances which came as ghosts to men are the spirits of the dead released to return temporarily to earth, or they are the feigned appearances used by the devil and his angels, or they are the fantastic forgeries of men's minds induced by melancholy or by passion.[16]

Such were the theories current at the time of Shakespeare, and the ghost of Hamlet's father seems to conform to all of

them. Nowadays, interpretations of the supernatural in Hamlet tend to rest mainly on Freudian ideas, according to which the ghost is a projection of the hero's super-ego. This view also explains why Hamlet cries "O my prophetic soul!" when the ghost reveals Claudius' crime.[17]

Another important fact about the ghost is that in its first appearance it is only seen by Hamlet's friends on the platform; the prince is not with them. When the spirit comes in for a second time, Hamlet is also there to see and listen to it. But in the closet scene, however, the ghost is only visible to Hamlet, and the queen cannot see it. It is as if it was meant to become more and more subjective as the play progresses; that is, more and more a product of Hamlet's mind, where madness is gradually intensified. Thus, the interview with the queen is the moment in the play when Hamlet is closest to actual madness--or, at least, Gertrude believes so. In spite of Hamlet's assertion that he is but "mad in craft," still one cannot be sure, for the very speech where he affirms this suggests that he is deeply distracted. He urges his mother not to reveal what he is about to tell, but he begins his speech with "Not this . . .," and then goes on to say things which are the very opposite of what he desires--"Let the bloat king tempt you . . . And let him . . . make you to ravel all this matter out. . . ." (III.iv.183,187)

As it has already been said, however, Shakespeare's heroes are never truly psychotic. Some way or another, they always manage to recover from their dangerous position on the border-line between a schizoid way of being-in-the-world and a psychotic one. It is not very clear, however, how this recovery takes place. In Hamlet's case, it obviously happens off-stage, for when he comes back from his sea-adventure, he has already undergone some change. Indeed, we may say, with

Bradley, that the Hamlet of the fifth act is a new man. He has refrained from action, delaying because of too much thinking. (His attitude echoes Kant's theories, for Hamlet tries to go beyond the nature of things--phenomena--to reach their true essence, things-in-themselves--noumena.) To parody King Lear, Hamlet has been more acted upon than acting; he has waited passively that something might happen that should decide for him (maybe divine providence). His "motto" has been, as Bradley puts it, "it does not matter," "it is not worth while," "it is no good."[18]

But, after Hamlet's frustrated trip to England, (the turning point of the tragedy), all changes. The veil of melancholy and inaction has been somewhat lifted from his brow and he is now ready to accept whatever may come.

> There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. (V.ii.202-205)

Hamlet's "motto" now seems to be "all is for the best." He has achieved what Aristotle called "tragic recognition" and, indeed, it is the more tragic because, as Bradley says, it comes too late. Now, Hamlet cannot avoid his own tragic fate. Once more he gives his enemies time and opportunity to conspire and prepare his death. There is no way to escape it now and Hamlet accepts it with the realization that "all is for the best."

When all is done--the revenge performed, the king killed, forgiveness exchanged with Laertes, Hamlet is finally in peace with his own conscience; he is himself again. Nevertheless, as is the case with Othello, too, Hamlet is worried about his reputation; he does not want to leave a "wounded name" behind him. So he asks Horatio,

> Absent thee from felicity awhile,
> And in this rash world draw thy breath in pain,
> To tell my story.
> (V.ii.329-31)

As Laertes had given his "dying voice" to Hamlet, so Fortinbras also receives Hamlet's, and, as the new ruling power in Denmark, gives the dead prince the treatment due to a soldier killed in battle, one who would "have proved most royally" had he become king.

As Laertes and Fortinbras are Hamlet's counterparts on the level of action, so Ophelia in her sweet lunacy is the hero's counterpart in the dimension of madness. He feigns a madness that he does not wholly have, whereas the girl's distraction is true and complete. Ophelia is quite young and innocent, loving to her brother and obedient to her father; her love for Hamlet does not seem to surpass, in depth, her affection for Polonius and Laertes. Indeed, as Bradley says, "her existence is wrapped up in these three."[19] The triangle within which she restricts her life determines her imminent isolation and consequent death. Her brother is abroad and Hamlet, gone mad for her love, kills her father; this is too much for her. Ophelia's whole life collapses and her mind goes with it.

The girl's sweetness and innocence are always associated with flowers, water, and the prime elements of nature. In her mad scenes, more than anywhere else in the play, this association is evident. Ophelia mentions flowers in her songs and also gives some specimens from the bunch she carries to those who watch her. She is drowned in a brook, and dies all dressed up "with fantastic garlands . . . of crown-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples." (IV.vii.169-70) At her burial, references to flowers as symbols of her sweetness and chastity are also constant. Laertes wishes that "from her fair and unpolluted flesh May violets spring," and the queen scatters flowers in the girl's grave, saying "sweets to the

sweet." (V.i) There is some irony here, because, since "her death was doubtful," the priest is not willing to perform the usual service of the dead, which begins with "dust to dust." Nevertheless, "sweets to the sweet" fits better here and works as a substitute for the normal rite. Thus, the flower-imagery which surrounds Ophelia throughout the play adds a special fragrance to the beauty of her character.

There is also irony in the fact that Ophelia's true madness treads upon the heels of Hamlet's feigned distraction. In the "nunnery scene" she pities his derangement, but it is she who will become truly mad in the end. One is reminded of the Elizabethan belief according to which reason, like order in the chain of being, was linked to the harmonious music of the spheres.[20] Ophelia was certainly referring to this belief when she described Hamlet's madness as "sweet bells, jangled out of tune and harsh" (III.i.157). Her own madness, however, does not seem to conform to the pattern, for the lyric quality of her distraction is in perfect harmony with the beauty and sweetness associated with her character. Nevertheless, the irony persists; Polonius announces that Hamlet has gone mad for Ophelia's love, but it is actually Ophelia who will lose her mind because she has been deceived.

Indeed, Ophelia is the character who is most deceived in this play. Hamlet deceives her three times: when he tells her he loves her and then denies it; when he tells her he does not love her any more, but still does; and when he makes her believe that he is mad. Most critics seem to find it strange that Hamlet should so deceive the woman he loved. Moreover, he also insults Ophelia openly. Gertrude's recent behaviour has driven Hamlet to think of women in a very unfavorable light. Therefore, swept by a fit of passion (like Othello when he strikes Desdemona), he cannot help directing at Ophelia

the offenses that he should apply to his mother. As Harry Levin aptly puts it, the "nunnery scene" is a rehearsal of the "closet scene," where Hamlet finally discloses his tormented soul to the queen. The same can be said of the "play scene" where Hamlet's indecent comments at Ophelia spring from his deep disillusionment with women in general and with his mother in particular. What Hamlet could not foresee, however, is that Ophelia would go mad herself as a consequence of so much deception and suffering.

Nevertheless, her going mad and consequent suicide can also be seen as a kind of preservation against further suffering. The gravedigger is not wholly wrong when he realizes that "she drowned herself in her own defense." (V.i.5) Indeed, in spite of being the purest and most innocent character in the play, yet Ophelia has to bear an enormous amount of pain. It is fair that her innocence should be "rewarded" with a sweet madness and a beautiful death, thus being spared from the final terrible scene of slaughter. She dies, as the queen says, "as one uncapable of her own distress." (IV.vii.179)

Ophelia's madness causes even more dismay among those around her because of the images associated with it. In her mad speeches, mainly in the songs she sings, she mixes references to her father and to Hamlet, talking about death, love and sex. When she sings

> . . . Let in the maid, that out a maid
> Never departed more,

the king cries out in surprise, "Pretty Ophelia!" (IV.v) Such a song with words such as these in it, sounds indeed very strange in the girl's mouth. She says things and asks questions that she would never have said and asked before. Thus, Ophelia's madness lifts the veil of court conventions which had always inhibited her from expressing such thoughts freely.

I have said that Hamlet never becomes truly psychotic in the play, because he is able to overcome his loss of identity through tragic recognition. This is not the case with Ophelia; here Laing's ideas are thoroughly applicable. Unlike Hamlet, Ophelia is not able to overcome her schizoid tendencies and advances further into a psychotic state. Harry Levin says that "the simple Ophelia is halved by loss of reason; she is divided from her judgement, 'without the which' . . . 'we are pictures of mere beasts.'" (IV.v.82)[21] This is very much so and very "Laingian" too. Ophelia, being weaker than Hamlet, cannot put herself together again, so to speak, and her poor, weak "self" becomes irremediably divided.

It has been said that there is a great difference between "falling" into madness on the one hand and "diving" into it on another.[22] This may be seen as the way Hamlet's madness differs from Ophelia's. She falls helplessly into madness, as one falls into a deep, dark well, whereas Hamlet "dives" into it, that is, he deliberately chooses this way. Ophelia, being weaker than he is, is not able to win the battle against the social and family pressures that come upon her, and so her mind gives way to madness, "like sweet bells, jangled out of tune and harsh."

Not only does Hamlet overcome such pressures, but he is also able to turn against them in the role of the critic, the "fool" who satirizes everything bitterly. The mask that he wears works as a kind of "X-ray" with which he can see through the conventions of society. Social convention is usually a nickname for hypocrisy and corruption, and Hamlet's Denmark is not an exception to the rule. The court is a place where pomp, vanity and flattery characterize everybody's actions, from the king himself down to the affected Osric.

Claudius' ceremonious entry on the stage with the whole court following in a splendid procession is the first instance of this. The king's speeches are always delivered in the smooth language of flattery, and his public affairs usually involve some Machiavellian policy in the guise of skilled diplomacy. Deception and falsehood are the habitual instruments used in the court. Hamlet is deceived in his ascent to power, though the king pompously announces that "you are the most immediate to our throne." (I.ii) Rosencranz and Guildenstern, willing to win Claudius' favours, also enlist in the troop of deceivers and, "sponge-like," try to find out Hamlet's secret. Polonius' love for figures of speech also reveals the importance given to artificial matters in the court. Corruption is everywhere.

Moreover, we must not forget the primary reasons which bring the ghost out of his grave: fratricide, usurpation and incest, all performed by the same person, "the serpent that . . . now wears the crown." (I.v.39-40) The ghost's appearance portends cosmic disorder, which is also reflected in the body politic (through rumours of political discontent and threats of foreign invasion), and on the family-level, where ties are broken and natural laws disregarded. Social order is jeopardized, internally and externally.

Marcellus says, very properly, that "something is rotten in the state of Denmark." (I.v.90) The rich imagery used by Shakespeare throughout the play strongly reinforces this idea. Images of gardening and of hidden disease are paramount here. Hamlet describes the world as

> . . . an unweeded garden
> That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
> Possess it merely.
>
> (I.ii.135-37)

Well-cultivated gardens usually stand for order and normality in Shakespeare, but a garden that grows to seed is related to neglect and chaos. Also, in V.ii, Claudius is compared to a disease, a "canker of our nature" that will enter into further evil if not stopped at once. The image is that of a contagious infirmity which goes on infecting everything around it (Claudius' drinking infects the Danish reputation abroad, just as his powerful "distilment" had infected his brother's "wholesome blood").

Thus, Denmark is rotten and corrupt; it is a prison, as Hamlet says, for he has seen through it all and can tell. His madness has allowed him to do so, and in this new perspective he can discriminate between false symbols and the "noumena," things-in-themselves. This echoes Laing's idea that everyone who achieves knowledge must "take on the job at the top,"[23] that is, knowledge implies responsibility. Hamlet has been responsible since the moment of the ghost's revelation. "I find thee apt" the spirit had said, and Hamlet himself agrees--". . . I have cause, and will, and strength, and means to do't." (IV.iv.45) We must not forget that this is also Bradley's opinion: "The man who suffers as Hamlet suffers . . . is considered irresponsible neither by other people nor by himself.[24]

But the responsibility that Laing talks about is not that of revenging the murder of a father; rather, he is talking about one's responsibility for others. In Laing's view, madness reveals society to itself, and this is, precisely, Hamlet's "job at the top," Like the "witty fool," the madman incorporates society's self-division in grotesque, exaggerated forms; thus madness works as revelation and as potential salvation for the evils of the world. Laing concludes The Politics of Experience with the following quotation:

> If I could turn you on, if I could drive you out of your wretched mind, if I could tell you, I would let you know.[25]

This is indeed what Hamlet seems to be saying; or, at least, what he tries to say both to Ophelia and to his mother. Horatio has already understood part of it, but Hamlet knows that he will waste his time if he tries to convey it to Rosencranz, Guildenstern, and Polonius, who are but tedious fools. Society in Denmark is too corrupt to realize and accept the truth behind the mask of Hamlet's "madness." Instead, they take it to be true madness, and refuse to look into the mirror that Hamlet lifts up to them. In their attempt to protect themselves (for "madness in great ones must not unwatched go" (III.ii.187)), they separate the unknown from the familiar--and Hamlet is now the "unknown." So he is sent abroad, ". . . this deed, for thine especial safety-- . . . must send thee hence." (IV.iii.39-41) This is, in Laing's terminology, "violence masquerading as love"[26]; it is destruction in the guise of protection.

Thus, Hamlet becomes the very embodiment of Laing's ideas, a symptom and a victim of a sick society--"heaven hath pleased it so, . . . that I must be their scourge and minister." (III.iv) Moreover, for Laing, the mad person also functions as a source of cure for this same society, and Hamlet knows this, too--"O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right!" (I.v) He knows that there are painful discrepancies between his aspirations and his accomplishments. His own, inner self is sorely divided and he is sick at heart.

But madness itself is a way of comprehending and partially relieving personal suffering. Hamlet, having seen what he has seen, has acquired the capacity of pulling free from his "madness." He has undergone what Laing calls "an initiation ceremonial" where the person on the verge of a schizophrenic breakdown is driven "further into inner space and time, and back again."[27] Thus, Hamlet becomes finally able "to heal,

to cleanse and to create harmony"[28] in a sick society, preparing the way for that inevitable restoration of order which he himself foresees and welcomes.

> . . . I do prophesy th'election lights
> On Fortinbras. He has my dying voice.
> (V.ii.337-38)

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

[1]Holland, op. cit., p. 150.

[2]Bradley, op. cit., p. 97.

[3]See Chapter Two, 2.3 - Madness and Folly.

[4]Harry Levin, The Question of Hamlet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 125.

[5]S. T. Coleridge, "Lectures," Hamlet: Critical Essays, p. 31.

[6]Ibid., p. 30.

[7]R. D. Laing, The Divided Self (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1965), p. 17. Hereafter, DS.

[8]Ibid., p. 39.

[9]Ibid., pp. 66-69.

[10]Ibid., p. 40.

[11]Ibid., p. 80.

[12]Ibid., p. 88.

[13]Hegel, quoted by Laing, DS, p. 87.

[14]Laing, DS, p. 88.

[15]See Chapter One, 1.2 - Review of Criticism.

[16]Campbell, op. cit., p. 92.

[17]See Chapter One, the "psychological" school of criticism, especially Ernest Jones's ideas about Hamlet.

[18]Bradley, op. cit., p. 98.

[19]Ibid., p. 130.

[20]See Chapter Two, 2.2 - Madness and Cosmology.

[21]Levin, op. cit., p. 64.

[22]This image was once used by Karl Jung in relation to James Joyce, on the one hand, and his mad daughter, Lucia, on the other. The story is available in Richard Ellmann's James Joyce (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 692: ". . . she and her father . . . were like two people going to the bottom of a river, one falling and the other diving."

[23]R. D. Laing, The Politics of Experience (New York: Ballantine Books, 1967), p. 157. Hereafter P.E.

[24]Bradley, op. cit., p. 97.

[25]Laing, P.E., p. 190.

[26]Ibid, p. 58.

[27]Ibid., p. 128.

[28]Knight, op. cit., p. 20.

CHAPTER FOUR

OTHELLO

It is impossible to say precisely just when Othello was written. It is believed that it followed soon after Hamlet, but its earliest recorded performance dates from 1604, when Shakespeare's company played Othello before King James I at Whitehall. The best guess as to its composition seems to be some date between late 1601 and 1602, and it had probably been on the public stage before the court performance. Shakespeare found the story of Othello in a collection of Italian stories called the Hecatomithi by Giraldi Cinthio, an aristocrat and philosophy professor of Ferrara. Shakespeare must have read either the original Italian edition (1566) or its French translation of 1584, for no English version is known before 1753.

The play tells us the story of Othello, a Moorish general who has pledged his loyalty and his sword to the Venetian republic. Othello secretly marries a beautiful and well-born Venetian white lady, Desdemona, but her father, Brabantio, accuses the Moor of having bewitched her. The matter is taken to the Duke of Venice, but Desdemona confesses her love for Othello, whom she has married of her own free will. The Duke wants Othello to fight the Turkish forces in Cyprus and he allows Othello and his wife to depart on this voyage.

Meanwhile, the Moor's ensign, Iago, envious of Michael Cassio's promotion (which he thinks should have been given him, instead), prepares a Machiavellian plan to have his revenge on Othello and Cassio. One of Desdemona's would-be suitors, Roderigo, is persuaded to help him. In Cyprus, they incite

the new lieutenant to have one drink too many, which raises a brawl during the night watch. Othello dismisses Cassio from his office, but Iago convinces the young man to ask Desdemona's help in winning Othello's favour back. She does so, but her husband does not give much importance to her plea.

However, Iago subtly begins to poison Othello's mind against Desdemona and Cassio, suggesting that their relationship goes beyond ordinary respect and affection. The Moor is greatly disturbed by Iago's words and demands that he present a proof of Desdemona's unfaithfulness. This proof is the handkerchief which Othello had given her as his first gift. Iago pretends he has seen it in Cassio's hand. As a matter of fact, he had entreated his wife, Emilia, to steal it from Desdemona, and had purposefully dropped it in Cassio's lodging.

Iago becomes bolder and bolder in his images of Desdemona and Cassio in bed together, and the tortured Othello falls in a trance. Afterwards, he sees his hankerchief in the hands of Cassio's mistress, Bianca, and is then convinced of Desdemona's adultery. Iago promises to arrange Cassio's death before the night is over and suggests that Othello should strangle Desdemona in her bed. He convinces Roderigo to help him in the murder of Cassio, but the lieutenant is only hurt and it is Roderigo himself who dies.

In Desdemona's bedchamber, Othello accuses her of adultery with Cassio and, despite her denials, he begins to strangle her. Emilia interrupts him with news about Cassio's wounding, and hears Desdemona murmur that she has been falsely murdered. The Moor confesses his deed, saying that Iago has proved Desdemona's guilt. Emilia curses her husband and calls Othello a fool. All the others are summoned by her cries and, gradually, the details of the whole plot emerge, and Iago's knavery is clear. The villain still has time to kill Emilia,

but refuses to speak. Othello then wounds him, realizing that he has been a dupe in Iago's hands. He reminds the others to tell the truth about him and kills himself, "dying upon a kiss."

Othello is said to be one of the most beautiful and poetical of Shakespeare's tragedies. Its musical language, its rich imagery and, above all, the romantic aura that surrounds the whole play and its main character, are responsible for this belief. Like the other three tragedies, Othello is dominated by its protagonist. The Moor commands our interest from the very beginning of the play, even before we see him. We listen to Iago as he confesses his hatred for the Moor to Roderigo--". . . I hate him (Othello) as I do hell-pains . . ." (I.i.150) According to the ensign, Othello is given to "loving his own pride and purposes." Roderigo also talks of him viciously ("the thick-lips"; I.i.63), and we begin to build up a picture of Othello as boastful, sensual and hateful.

Such a picture is obviously reinforced by our knowledge of the Elizabethan attitude towards Moors and Negroes. The association between the colour black and evil and, conversely, that between "white" and "virtue" is almost universal and was very much alive in Shakespeare's time. To the Elizabethan, the Moor or Negro was black, ugly, cruel, evil, pagan, sexually rampant and barely human--and the picture which Iago and Roderigo paint of Othello in the first scene of the play exactly coincides with this stereotype.

But when we actually come to see Othello, we are greatly surprised. Shakespeare's mastery has allowed him to mold his hero after the Elizabethan stereotype and yet turn it against itself, so to speak. He has managed to change everything about the stereotyped black man, except his blackness. Othello is not a pagan, but a converted Christian; not a barbarian,

but a truly civilized and noble figure; and there is a suggestion that his sexual appetite, far from being excessive, is in decline (". . . not to please the palate of my appetite, nor to comply in heat, the young affects in my defunct and proper satisfaction . . ." (I.iii.257-270)). There is a whole range of symbolism deriving from this paradox of black and white in the play. Contrasts between "inside" and "outside," surface appearance and inner reality are paramount here and will be discussed later in this chapter.

Let us now turn more closely to the very peculiar character of the hero. Othello comes to Venice from another culture and brings with him different values from those of this purely commercial society. He comes from across the sea, with something of the myth and mystery of the sea still clinging to him. (One is here reminded of the very peculiar qualities associated with water during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and which M. Foucault talks about in Madness and Civilization. The sea had always been seen as a source of mystery, a symbol of the unknown. And to the man who travels by sea, "the land he will come to" and, "once he disembarks, the land from which he comes," become likewise symbols of the unknown.[1]) This obviously adds to Othello's race and adventurous life in that it emphasizes the mystery which surrounds him.

Othello is noble, trusting (perhaps too trusting) and idealistic: the very type of the gallant soldier, he is valiant, virtuous, and totally without guile. He owes all this, of course, to his special nature, which (let us remember Bradley), "raises him above the level of average man," and also to the kind of life he has led and the place where he comes from.

Othello has chosen to serve Venice and his services have been accepted, but the blackness of his skin marks him off as

an outsider in the republic. He is respected and treated with courtesy, but beneath the outward show of honour, Othello still provokes deeper feelings of doubt and resentment among his Venetian masters. Shakespeare himself seems to surrender to the popular contemporary ideas about the black man as a savage and vengeful beast. Towards the end of the play he shows us an ugly Othello, demented with jealousy and rage, murdering his innocent wife. He rolls his eyes and gnaws his nether lip, and talks rudely to her, as one from a barbarian country was supposed to do. The mad Othello fitly conforms to the Elizabethan stereotype.

But we must not forget that Othello is brought to this pass against his own nature by the villainous Iago, a white man. "Against" his own nature or, rather, "according" to his own nature, for, as Bradley wrote, "Othello's nature is all of one piece. His trust, where he trusts, is absolute. Hesitation is almost impossible to him."[2] Iago was certainly quick in perceiving this peculiar trait of Othello's character, and he knew how to use it for the success of his plan.

As Othello is the outsider in Venice, Iago is the typical "insider," a native of the city, used to its ways and trusted by everyone. He seems to be the best person to help Othello find his way about in the sophisticated Venetian society. Yet, ironically, he is more of an outsider than Othello himself, for Iago's villainy cuts him off from the entire human world. He is the embodiment of cool-blooded rationality and of the scientific principles of inquiry and experiment which occupied men's minds in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Set against Othello's more human, inner and intuitive values, Iago's principles quickly overcome and destroy them.

Critics have always discussed Iago's attitudes, never quite coming to an agreement concerning his motivations. Some

echo Coleridge's famous phrase--"the motive-hunting of motiveless malignity"--arguing that Iago does not really understand his own motivations and merely rationalizes his behaviour; others see Iago's motives as he professes to see them himself. It is not my purpose, however, to try to solve this problem. The crucial thing here is that the deeds issuing from the villain's machinations are disastrous to Othello, for the ensign will practice "upon his peace and quiet, even to madness." (II.i.301-302)

Indeed, he does so, and Othello is driven into a desperate, peculiar kind of madness, which is the ugliest of the four cases studied in this dissertation. It has nothing of the beautiful melancholy of Hamlet's "antic disposition," nor the painful, purgatorial quality of Lear's madness; nor does it spring out of ambition and supernatural incitement, as is the case with Macbeth. Iago's work undermines the Moor's mind with suggestions that Desdemona is unfaithful to him; in a word, Othello goes mad with sexual jealousy. In III.iii, Iago's technique of merely repeating Othello's words has exactly the desired effect of creating a "monster" in Othello's thoughts--even though he says the very opposite:

> By heaven, thou echoest me!
> As if there were some monster in thy thought
> Too hideous to be shown.
> (III.iii.106-8)

After having stirred Othello's mind in vague and general terms, Iago proceeds to more explicit statements of menace, such as "It were not for your quiet nor your good . . . to let you know my thoughts." (III.iii.152-54) The seed of suspicion has been planted in Othello's mind and Iago patiently waits for it to germinate. The first hint that the buds are growing comes with Othello's "why did I marry?" (line 242) And when he later cries "Farewell the tranquil mind! . . . Othello's

occupation's gone!" (11.346-55), he is renouncing, like Hamlet, "all trivial fond records, . . . all pressures past" (Hamlet, I.v), "all the uses of this world." (I.ii)

Othello's thoughts begin to grow confused; his beautiful and coherent speech gradually degenerates into contradictory or disconnected images and ideas. Iago sees this and is now ready to take one further step. He becomes more brutal and direct in his "insinuations" about Desdemona's behaviour, goading Othello to madness with visual details, till the tortured Moor cries out "O monstrous, monstrous!" and is at last convinced--"Now do I see 'tis true." (III.iii.442) And we are once more reminded of Hamlet (I.v.29-31) when Othello says,

> . . . my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,
> Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,
> Till a capable and wide revenge
> Swallow them up.
>
> (III.iii.455-58)

The seed of suspicion planted in Othello's mind is now a flowering tree and Iago picks its first flower; having sworn obedience to "wronged Othello" in an almost ritualistic scene, he receives his long-desired lieutenancy and, ironically, replies, "I am your own for ever." (III.iii.478) This line ought to be uttered by Othello to correspond to the reality of the situation, for Othello's possession by the devil Iago is now complete. Here, of course, the idea of the "double" applies, since Othello and Iago "merge" personalities.[3]

But the climax of Othello's torment comes in IV.i, when Iago, confident that the Moor is completely under his power, does not trouble to choose ambiguous words and suggestive images any longer. On the contrary, he goes straight to the point, talking freely about Desdemona "naked with her friend in bed . . . not meaning any harm." (IV.i.314) The bitter hypocrisy of these words only serves to increase Othello's agony.

This is one of the great plays, attributed to Shakespeare's "dark" period, where he deals with the idea of nausea with sex. We have already seen instances of this in Hamlet, where the prince grows deeply disgusted at his mother's incest and also at the idea that the girl he loved might behave like the Queen. In Othello, the sex images are cruder and even more disgusting than in the preceeding play. Maybe the contrast is still sharper because these images come almost unexpectedly amidst the beautiful poetic language of the play. Othello's sexual jealousy is born out of them, but actually, out of nothing, for these images are only illusions created by Iago's cunning.

The villain's technique of uttering hesitant and indefinite sentences, for instance, inflames Othello's imagination and he begins to fill in all the hideous details for himself. But the effort is more than Othello can bear and he collapses in a fit. His language also rapidly degenerates into disconnected raving.

> Lie with her! Lie on her!--We say lie on her when they belie her.--Lie with her! 'Zounds, that's fulsome! Handkerchief--confessions--handkerchief!--To confess, and be hanged for his labor. First to be hanged, and then to confess. I tremble at it. Nature would not invest herself in such shadowing passion without some instruction. It is not words that shake me thus. Fish! Noses, ears, and lips. Is't possible?--Confess?--Handkerchief?--Oh, devil!
>
> (IV.i.36-44)

The tree which grew out of Iago's venemous seed is now in full blossom, and the harvest will soon be reaped--"How shall I murder him, Iago?" (III.iii.165)

Thus, we have seen that Othello's madness springs out of the sexual jealousy over Desdemona which Iago is so skilful in reducing him to.[4] The ensign is a past master in the arts of convincing, deceiving and fooling others, while still pretending

a show of honesty and concern. Othello falls an easy fly in this spider's slender web.

Maybe it can be said that the ultimate theme of Othello lies in the confrontation between surface, social values (represented by Iago) and individual, inner values (Othello's world), and also in the consequent conflict issuing from such a confrontation. Indeed, Iago's cool rationality and calculation are based on the average and the general (faithful allies of scientific methods of inquiry), and not on the individual and the particular. Thus, he begins to infect Othello's mind about Desdemona with thoughts which he himself may plausibly believe about the general behaviour of Venetian women. (And we must not forget that Othello trusts him because Iago knows a lot more about this society.)

What Iago cannot see, however, is that the individual who is Desdemona, and consequently her relationship with Othello, are exceptions which do not conform to the rule.

The deep, intuitive knowledge which Othello has (or thinks he has) about his wife is far more accurate and true than Iago's dangerous generalizations--but Othello will not believe it. That is why Iago's plot is successful. To use R. D. Laing's terminology, Othello assumes a "self" which is not his own--the "social self" of Venetian society offered by Iago and which does not at all fit the hero's larger-than-life nature. Desdemona also shares this social self with her Venetian fellow-citizens, but her love for Othello does not spring from it, but from her individual, inner nature. She saw "Othello's visage in his mind." (I.iii.248)

Yet, one cannot wholly ignore the idea that there was something unnatural about Othello and Desdemona's marriage from the beginning. Desdemona's love for Othello can be better understood as an identification, on her part, with his

adventurous life, his freedom, the exotic places he had seen and the experiences and the dangers he had lived. She would like to have had this kind of life herself, but she can only experience these things now through Othello's beautiful narratives. Therefore, she marries him because she could feel in his company some of the Quixotic emotions which he talked about. (Othello's first address to her in Cyprus--"O, my fair warrior!" (II.i.176) must have been highly gratifying for her.)

Othello, on the other hand, willing to be accepted in the Venetian society where he felt marked off by the colour of his skin, marries this beautiful, white girl who had so impressed him by her interest in his stories and by her sensitivity while listening to them. This, together with Othello's self-ignorant idealism, led him to a kind of love for Desdemona where her position was that of an idol on a high pedestal, and his that of the worshipper.

It is certainly clear to the reader of Othello that Shakespeare criticizes this kind of idealistic love by opposing it to Iago's sharp, "down-to-earth" rationalism. (I will be talking about the character of Iago later in this chapter.)

As in Hamlet, Laing's ideas are often applicable to Othello. The fact that the Moor is an outsider determines his isolation in the society. Hence his extreme pride concerning his valour in state-affairs, and hence, too, his insecurity, which can be stated in terms of "ontological insecurity." Othello is not at home in the sophisticated society of Venice, and he feels particularly insecure in his new role of husband. That is why Desdemona's love, which gives him an intimate, living link with Venice, is central to his being. When he thinks it is gone, he feels as if he lost his identity (his true, innermost self), and "chaos is come again." (III.iii.92)

Othello's insecurity is also based on his partial self-ignorance. It is not that he does not know himself--the man

who confronts Brabantio and his group with the famous "Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them," (I.ii.58) is under perfect self-control. What happens is that Othello has to redefine his sense of his own identity in terms of the Venetian World--which is disastrously done for him by Iago. We are here reminded of Laing's words: ". . . a basically ontologically secure person will encounter the hazards of life . ... from a centrally firm sense of his own and other people's identity."[5] This is obviously not the case with Othello. He sees everything through Iago's eyes, he thinks Iago's thoughts, and he even comes to talk Iago's language in the end--". . . keep it as a cistern for foul toads to knot and gender in . . ." (IV. ii.60-61) Freudian critics argue that Othello becomes like Iago because Iago is that part of his own self which has been denied and repressed.[6]

His own "inner" self is paralysed as if by a lethargy, and Othello begins to experience the world around him and the persons in it through the false, "surface" self of Venice. Thus, Desdemona's true, "inner" reality and identity become invisible to him; following Iago's path, Othello sees Desdemona as a frail woman, an unfaithful wife, and a whore. These are false, "outside" appearances which are contrasted with her true, "inside" reality. Here lie the paradoxes between "outside" and "inside," surface and inner realities, white and black. There is a complex net of ironies in the fact that Desdemona, the pure, white angel, should be accused of falsehood by Othello, the good and noble black man, through the work of Iago, a malignant, "white" devil. The meanings of the symbols are changed--what is "black" in the outside is "white" in the inside, and vice-versa. Here we can say, like in Macbeth, "fair is foul and foul is fair."

Desdemona and Othello were indeed right about each other, and Iago, the "realist" completely and disastrously wrong.

This realization comes upon Othello at the very end of the tragedy, with the knowledge that Desdemona was what he had believed her to be. He recovers his identity and his faith in a good world, one like "one entire and perfect chrysolite." (V. ii.143) This realization, however, comes too late for anything but a heroic death. Othello's last speech is compensatory; by fixing his imagination on a moment of his past when he was the noble Moor serving the Venetian state against the heathen Turk, he re-enacts the event and becomes both his former self (the noble warrior) and his present degraded state (an enemy to the state).

> And say besides that in Aleppo once,
> Where a malignant and turbaned Turk
> Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
> I took by th' throat the circumcised dog
> And smote him--thus.
> (V.ii.349-53)

Here again one can witness Othello's self-division into an executing white man (the Venetian he would like to become) and an executed Turk (the black barbarian whom he could not help being).

In my Review of Criticism I have discussed some of the main lines of interpretation referring to Othello within the psychological school. Among them, two of the most widely accepted are the theory of the "double man" and that which relates Othello's problems to his insecurity as a black man in a white world.

The theory of the double has been generally accepted in relation to the characters of Othello and Iago. The idea is that they are not actually two separate "personae," but "doubles," or decomposed parts of a single psychological entity. Thus, the conflict in the play subsists not simply "within" Othello or Iago as individuals, or "between" them, but both

"within" and "between" them at the same time. It is an "endo-psychic" conflict, to use the psychoanalytical terminology.

The second line of reasoning in the psychological criticisms of Othello which I have referred to above, is perhaps more relevant to this work in that it better resembles Laing's ideas applied to the tragedy. Such critics concentrate their arguments more or less on the same lines which I have tried to follow in my discussion of Othello's character. They talk about his ignorance of women and love in general, and the consequent insecurity Othello experienced in relation to his virility, his age and his race--a mark of distinction in a white society. All this has already been discussed.

But perhaps the greatest contribution of these critics lies in the fact that they concentrate on Iago and his knavery to explain Othello's tragedy. Some commentators have suggested that Iago or no Iago, things would have followed their course and Othello would have met his tragic fate anyway. This view, it seems to me, sorely damages the importance and the respect we owe to the character of Iago; for, if the "double-man" theory is to be believed, one should attach to Iago at least as much relevance as to Othello.

One of the major representatives of the line of criticism which is being examined here is W. H. Auden. I have already mentioned Auden's essay "The Joker in the Pack" in my discussion of Madness and Folly.[7] There I have suggested that Iago's attitude, based on his excessive rationalism and scientific curiosity, could also be seen as a kind of madness. Auden's essay seems to pursue the same idea. It begins with a two-line quotation from J. H. Newman which reads

> Reason is God's gift; but so are the passions.
> Reason is as guilty as passion.[8]

Here lie all the intricacies of Iago's situation. His actions are governed by reason; there is not one single moment

in the play where he allows himself to be overcome by passion. As Ms. Campbell would say, he is not "a slave of passion." Iago is, if I can say so, "a slave of reason." Indeed, Iago's rationalism blinds him to all passions (including love) and to the beauty which comes with them. Bradley had already seen this, as the critic and editor John Wain tells us:

> . . . he (Bradley) understands the essential truth about him (Iago), that he was less than a complete human being because love had been left out of his composition, left out so completely that he did not recognize it or suspect its existence.[9]

Thus, Iago could not understand the magic in Othello and Desdemona's relationship, and his definition of love as "merely a lust of the blood and a permission of the will" (I.iii. 329), certainly accounts for this. His cool rationality, his scientific habit of generalization and his ignorance of true, healthy feelings, combine to form Iago's very special kind of madness. Like Othello's, Iago's nature is also divided, but in a different way. He lacks the proper balance between "head" and "heart," or rather, he has no "heart" at all. Hamlet also grows all "head,"[10] but he does not wholly lose his sensitive part, his "heart."

Moreover, what Auden tells us about the "practical joker" resembles Laing's ideas so much that it is impossible to ignore it. He defines a practical joke as

> . . . a demonstration that the distinction between seriousness and play is not a law of nature but a social convention which can be broken, and that a man does not always require a serious motive for deceiving another.[11]

And he goes on to say that "all practical jokes are anti-social acts" and always "involve deception." The practical joker must reveal afterwards what he has done to his victims, but they will learn nothing about his nature or his motives, only about themselves. Laing's idea that madness reveals society to itself is obviously inherent here. Auden also says that the goal

of the practical joker, "to make games of others, makes his existence absolutely dependent on theirs; when he is alone, he is a nullity." He is driven to his activity by "a fear of lacking a concrete self, of being nobody."[12]

What is being implied here is that Iago could only have a sense of his own self through the existence of others (especially Othello, his "double"), and since his identity was so weak and dependent, he tried to put himself above them by deceiving and fooling them. As Auden points out, "behind the joker's contempt for others lies something else, a feeling of self-sufficiency, of a self lacking in authentic feelings and desires of its own."[13]

This can lead us to conclude that, like Othello, Iago also suffers from a kind of ontological insecurity. Laing says that "the false self arises in compliance with the intentions and expectations of the other" but this compliance is also a technique of concealing and preserving one's own true self. "The observable behaviour . . . is often perfectly normal. We see a model child, an ideal husband, an industrious clerk."[14] Iago is both the ideal husband and the model citizen--"honest" and "trustful." He pretended to be what he was not--"I am not what I am," he says (I.i.62), but he never comes to say exactly what he is. He hides his true self from everybody till the end of the play; and though Gratiano assures him that "Torments will ope your lips," we are certainly sure that Iago will not say anything.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

[1]Foucault, op. cit., p. 11.

[2]Bradley, op. cit., p. 155.

[3]See Chapter One, Review of Criticism.

[4]I have used the preposition "over" to avoid the ambiguity that might be suggested by "of," which would imply a latent homosexual motive in Othello's jealousy. I am aware of this kind of interpretation, but I chose to follow a different approach from the psychoanalytical.

[5]Laing, DS, p. 39.

[6]See my exposition of the Freudian critics in Chapter One, p. 11.

[7]See Chapter Two, p. 33.

[8]Auden, op. cit., p. 199.

[9]John Wain, Othello: Critical Essays, p. 19.

[10]See Chapter Three, p. 43.

[11]Auden, op. cit., p. 206.

[12]Ibid., p. 209.

[13]Ibid., p. 208.

[14]Laing, DS, pp. 98-99.

CHAPTER FIVE

KING LEAR

King Lear was first published in a quarto dated 1608, but it had entered the Stationer's Company register in the previous year. The first performance referred to dates from 1606, and, according to other evidences, it is believed that the play was written between the years 1605 and 1606.

The story of King Lear had its first written appearance as early as 1136 in the Historia Regnum Britanniae, compiled by the Welsh bishop Geoffrey of Monmouth. It also appears in a number of later writings, including Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles (1577) which was usually used by Shakespeare as the main source for his plays. There was also an earlier play called The True Chronicle Story of King Leir, produced in 1594 and printed in 1605. Shakespeare approached these sources with great freedom and added to them some inventions of his own: Lear's madness itself does not figure in the sources, and the tragic ending of the play--the defeat in battle, Cordelia's hanging and Lear's death--is also Shakespeare's own creation.

As far as the Gloucester plot is concerned, Shakespeare certainly based it on a well-known story from Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia, a collection of romances in the pastoral style (1590). It is usually referred to as "the story of the Paphlogonian king." Here, too, Shakespeare felt free to adapt and create. Edgar's feigned madness and the fake suicide at Dover, for instance, are Shakespeare's own inventions. Also, many borrowings from the Arcadia story were transferred to the Lear

plot in Shakespeare's play, which attests once more to the playwright's freedom in dealing with these sources.

King Lear tells the story of an old king of ancient Britain who proposes to split up his kingdom and give a third to each of his daughters, Goneril, Regan and Cordelia. He asks each of them in turn to attest her love for him, and the older sisters take the safe way, giving fulsome but hollow declarations of their love. Cordelia, however, refuses to flatter the king and speaks only of the love she owes him as a daughter's duty to her father. Lear is enraged by her words and disinherits her; but despite Cordelia's having no dowry, the King of France accepts her as his wife. The Earl of Kent, who had risen in Cordelia's favour, is rashly banished by Lear, but he soon returns in disguise to serve the old king.

Quickly Lear finds that his two eldest daughters abuse their power, and he realizes his folly in giving away his possessions. Enraged, he leaves into the stormy night in company with his fool. Kent follows them and the group wanders on the desolate heath.

Meanwhile the subplot of the play deals with the story of the Earl of Gloucester and his two sons. Edmund, the illegitimate son, drives the legitimate Edgar from their father's favour, and Edgar has to flee for his life. He disguises himself as a poor, mad beggar, Tom o' Bedlam, and joins Lear's group on the heath.

Lear's suffering turns his mind and he rages madly at his two daughters. Cordelia hears of her father's plight and comes with a French army to relieve him and put him back on the throne. Gloucester remains loyal to Lear and arranges everything for the king's trip to Dover where he is to meet Cordelia. Then, Edmund accuses his father of treason before the Duke of Cornwall, and Gloucester is cruelly blinded. Afterwards, Edgar

is able to meet and help his blind father without revealing himself.

In the French camp Cordelia finally rejoins her old father and nurses him, but her army loses the battle against Edmund's forces and they are made prisoners. There are, however secret orders from Edmund concerning their deaths in prison.

Goneril and Regan die tragically because of their love for Edmund, and the Duke of Albany proclaims him a traitor. Edgar claims the right to fight him in single combat and gives his brother a mortal wound. Then he tells of his father's plight and how Gloucester's heart "burst smilingly" when he revealed himself.

Lear comes in bearing Cordelia's body and announces that he killed the knave that was "a-hanging" her. He also dies, broken-hearted, beside the daughter he had wronged.

King Lear has always been acknowledged as the most painful of Shakespeare's tragedies. Some editors in the seventeenth century had even attempted to "improve" Shakespeare's text for the reason that it was too painful; Nahum Tate's version (1681) is the best-known example. Dr. Johnson would later confess himself unwilling to re-read the last scenes of the play, until he had to approach it as an editor. The time came when romantics and Victorians believed that King Lear was unactable, a play "too great for the stage."

Yet, the play is still presented successfully on the modern stage, and very much as Shakespeare wrote it. Nevertheless, the profound pathos which had caused Tate and his followers to alter Shakespeare's text still persists. One of the main sources of pain in this tragedy lies in the fact that Lear, after having suffered so much, should be, in the end, revived, so to speak, for further torment. Cordelia's death,

when the play is almost over and all the evil characters already punished, borders on the monstrous; it is precisely what had disgusted Dr. Johnson so much.

Critics have always seen two extreme possible readings of King Lear: the Christian view, where fate is moral, and the absurdist, pessimistic view. Bradley himself seems to support the Christian reading, as he points out that the truth of the play lies in Edgar's "The gods are just," with its confidence in a rigidly vengeful god. Bradley sees Lear as in some sense purified and redeemed, as dying in joy at the thought of Cordelia's revival, though the reader is certainly frustrated by the knowledge that this joy is but an illusion. Many modern critics have also followed the Christian view, seeing Lear as a Christ-like figure, passive, patient and redemptive.

As for the pessimistic view, as early a critic as Swinburne had already referred to it. The twentieth-century view also seems to support this existentialist, absurdist reading, especially during the revival which has occurred in the 1950's and 1960's. The critic Jan Kott, among others, has emphasized the apocalyptic absurdity of King Lear. He echoes, if somewhat differently, G. W. Knight's treatment of the play.[1] And there has also been a tendency to see Lear as "Promethean-like," that is, active instead of passive, defying the elements and the gods instead of patiently accepting whatever comes.

As far as madness is concerned, much has already been said about King Lear--much more, perhaps, than about any of the other tragedies. Lear's is the most obvious case of madness among Shakespeare's heroes. Indeed, he is the only one of them who actually becomes mad during the play. We have already seen Hamlet's consciously assuming a feigned madness and Othello's being cruelly pushed to an agonizing derangement by the sadistic Iago. We shall also be seeing Macbeth's blind will for power gradually become something like a fixed

idea, a mad obsession. But it is different with Lear; the old king actually loses his wits under the unbearable stress of mental and physical suffering.

Lear's character itself is largely responsible for his going mad. He is an absolute monarch, choleric by temperament, rash in his actions, hasty and superficial in his judgements. As such, Lear was used to flattery; and he was flattered to such an extent that he had to create an artificial situation for his daughters in order to decide which of them loved him the most. The pity of it, and also its irony, is that Lear does not know how to discern true love from false protestations, and he ends up by making the wrong choice. Lear sins for pride and vanity; he wants to give away the responsibility of kingship and still keep his title and his power. Moreover, he splits his kingdom, a dangerous thing to do as any Elizabethan would have said, for it goes against the natural order of the chain of being. Thus, Lear's character and actions determine his tragic flaw.

At the beginning of the play, the tone of Lear's speeches shows that no experience has led him so far to hesitate over the significance and duties of kingship. His relations with those close to him mirror the ambivalence of his own attitudes. However, Kent's boundless loyalty to the king shows that there are qualities in Lear that are hardly apparent to others.

Lear needs his fool to show him some of the qualities below the surface of what is happening, even when the demonstration is beyond the reach of words. In the beginning, Lear does not want to be reminded of the unhappiness mounting up in the train of his arbitrary decision. Later on, this reality is forced upon him by madness.

Rejected by his daughters, he determines to face adversity without the advantages of comfort and respect which would

go along with his age and status. The challenge proves too demanding and his wits begin to turn, as he himself says (III. ii.66).

Gradually, Lear reaches an awareness of the only thing that can bring him ultimate reconciliation with the realities of the human condition, a deeper search for what is essential in mankind. The imaginary trial of Goneril and Regan, for instance, furthers this consideration. It explores the connection between Lear's new view of humanity--hinted at in III.iv. 97-102--and the meting out of justice.

> It shall be done, I will arraign them straight.
> Come, sit thou here, most learned justicer.
> Thou, sapient sir, sit here. Now, you she-foxes!
> (III.vi.18-21)

Lear abandons the idea of harsh punishment and thinks instead of the orderly processes of law as a means of punishing his daughters. He invites Edgar and the Fool to sit in judgement as if they were court officers. This mock-trial is very close to the rites of misrule celebrated in the Medieval and Renaissance traditions; it is not by mere chance that there is a fool in this "court."

Indeed, King Lear is within that Erasmian tradition where society and wisdom have grown so far away from nature as to be abnormal in themselves. Thus, Folly and (its cousin) madness take up the responsibility of pointing out what true order is, and it is this inversion that leads Lear to see the real nature of things.

Lear's next appearance in IV.iv, fantastically dressed with wild flowers, marks the climax of his madness. He cannot follow any line of reasoning and is distracted by hallucinations. However, he and Gloucester manage to recognize each other and, in his madness, Lear begins to universalize his own suffering and to penetrate its sources more profoundly than he was able to do in his apparent sanity.

> They flattered me like a dog; . . .
> To say "ay" and "no" to everything
> That I said! "Ay" and "no" too
> was no good divinity. . . . They told me
> I was everything; 'tis a lie, I
> am not augue-proof.
>
> (IV.vi.96-104)

He has learnt his truth; he has also learnt patience, which he teaches Gloucester--"Thou must be patient. We came crying hither." (lines 171-72) Besides, he has learnt something about his daughters, justice, and kingly power.

In the speech beginning "Ay, every inch a king," he discourses upon the frailty of human condition and the subject of sex relations. His concern with women's hypocrisy, which springs from his daughters' behaviour, echoes Hamlet's disgust with his mother--Hamlet grew inflamed and incoherent at this thought, while Lear pursues the subject more coherently, in impassioned detail.

Lear's speech on authority is also illuminating in many aspects. First of all, it adds to the fact that even in the depths of madness one can use one's ordinary mental faculties and be sensible. Greatly impressed, the disguised Edgar cannot help noticing that it is "Reason in madness." (line 169)

Also, this speech abounds in references to one of the play's outstanding images--that of clothing. In III.iv, Lear had already realized that "unaccommodated man is no more but . . . a poor, bare, forked animal" (line 101), and he determined to have his "lendings" off--"Come, unbutton here." (line 103) Now, in IV.vi, he sees that this image also works in legal matters, where powerful but corrupt officials who look honourable because of their fine clothing, judge and condemn poor, humble people when they themselves should undergo punishment; the greater criminal condemns the lesser.

> Through tattered clothes small vices do appear,
> Robes and furred gowns hide all. (IV.vi.158-59)

This is the last time we see Lear mad on the stage. When he appears again, he is in Cordelia's company and is by her care brought back to consciousness and sanity--even though he may believe the contrary.

> I am a very foolish old man.
> . . . And, to deal plainly,
> I fear I am not in my perfect mind.
> (IV.vii.61-64)

Lear realizes his folly and is now willing to have his dearest daughter's forgiveness. He has learnt humility; madness has taught him and he comes out of madness a better man. I am not saying that he is not mad in the end only because he says coherent things, or because the despair which overcomes him is not an abnormality. In a play where sane and rational people (Edmund, Cornwall and the sisters) are so abnormally cruel, madness should well be considered the normal pattern. Moreover, as we have already seen, a madman does not necessarily say incoherent things.

But I agree that Lear is not mad in the end; otherwise the pathos of the tragedy would have been greatly lost. The force of its poignancy lies precisely on Lear's renewed suffering at Cordelia's death, after having seen, at a distance, the approaching happiness--to set his rest on her kind nursery.

I have already mentioned Alan Sinfield's essay which relates King Lear to Laing's The Self and Others.[2] He says that Lear sets up "what Laing calls a 'double-blind' situation," where there is a profound incompatibility between what he demands from his daughters (personal emotion) and the way he puts the demanding (public ceremony). Sinfield quotes Laing,

> the "victim" is caught in a tangle of paradoxical injunctions, or of attributions having the force of injunctions, in which he cannot do the right thing. . . . One person conveys to the other that he should do something, and at the same time conveys on another level that he should not, or that he should do something else incompatible with it.[3]

Lear initially proposes a demonstration of love, but he "becomes the victim of the false system he himself created."[4] Goneril and Regan also engage him in a similar "double-kind." They make use of the obvious confusion Lear makes between power and love and prepare the ground for further confusion, that is, confusion in Lear's mind, madness. The more they thwart and torture him, the more they claim to be acting in his own best interest. When they quarrel over Lear's train of followers, the old king is stirred to his first great insight--"O! reason not the need; our basest beggars/ Are in the poorest thing superfluous." (II.iv.260-261)

Lear realizes that he has been deluded in his authority, and, for him, loss of authority (kingship) means loss of identity, which he equates with his title. Thus, he has to redefine himself; having reached old age, he has to learn again, like a child, who he is. He finds himself reduced to the simplest possible terms (the bare forked animal) and loses his wits in the process. As Sinfield puts it, Lear's madness:

> lies not in the (false) notion of unappreciated generosity, but in the growth of a simultaneous and contradictory awareness that he was not generous, that he is not the person he has taken himself to be.[5]

This is all very "Laingian." Indeed, <u>King Lear</u> fits Laing's ideas better than any of the other tragedies. The notion that madness is the process by which Lear is restored to his own, true reality is present throughout Laing's work.

Having known the horror of Bedlam, but also seen through it the brilliant sparkle of truth, the old king achieves the fresh perception of one newly born into the world. As one of Laing's patients says returning from a "psychic voyage" recorded in <u>The Politics of Experience</u>, everything becomes much more "real" than before and the patient is now much more "aware"--

not simply of appearances, but also of the moral aspects of things.[6]

Laing says that the psychotic's existential position is unbearable; he "cannot take the realness, aliveness, autonomy and identity of himself and others for granted."[7] Therefore, this individual can no longer trust things and people as he would have done before. This is precisely where ontological insecurity ensues.

Lear's case is very much the same: deceived by his daughters, he cannot bring himself to trust anybody else again--except, perhaps, for his "philosopher," who has also suffered, as Lear thinks, in the hands of unkind daughters.

In Laing's words, "the therapist must have the plasticity to transpose himself into another strange and alien view of the world," that of the patient's. "Only thus," Laing adds, "can he arrive at an understanding of the patient's existential position."[8] This is precisely what Edgar and the Fool do with Lear --Edgar even more than the Fool, being thus called a "philosopher."

Indeed, the heath scenes have an obvious relevance to Laing's theories. The inversion of order which takes place on the heath suggests a kind of "theology" in this play which modern existentialists have found very contemporary. Lear, like Hamlet, is not only questioning the morality of a few relatives, but the moral order of the universe itself, and the very idea of a benign creator. There is a metaphysic implicit in his madness, as we can clearly see in his mad speeches.

However, unlike the contemporary heroes of the theatre of the absurd, Lear does not end up still fighting against Fate and the gods, but he seems to find some peace through purgation.

It is also interesting to see that the therapeutic role played by madness in this tragedy echoes the classical function

of comedy. It supports the Erasmian notion of the social function of Folly in that it confirms fundamental feelings and destroys artificial standards. This is summarized, as we have already seen, in Barber's formula, "through release to clarification."[9] G. W. Knight found a grotesque element in this "fantastic comedy," and it is not by chance that we have a Fool in King Lear.

I have already mentioned the functions attached to the role of the fool: a critic of society, a satirist of human evils, and a playful entertainer in the court.[10] Lear's fool, besides being all these things, also embodies, with Edgar, the function of the "chorus" of a Greek tragedy, accompanying the mad king throughout his purgation, reminding him of his folly, and warning him about madness. "This cold night will turn us all into fools and madmen." (III.iv.75)

Edgar, in the guise of poor mad Tom, is also vital to the play. Primarily for self-protection he takes on the guise of a Bedlam beggar. When Lear sees the "mad" Edgar in front of the hovel, he assimilates the role of madness and destitution. Indeed, Lear's madness is mirrored and magnified in Edgar and in the Fool--and by being thus projected into "reflector" characters, can be recognized by Lear himself. But the king establishes with his philosopher a relationship which he could not achieve with the Fool--maybe because Edgar's nakedness fits Lear's madness better than the Fool's traditional coxcomb.

Anyway, both of them, and also Kent to a certain extent (he, too, assumes a disguise), work as "guides" to Lear in his mad scenes. Kent is mainly servant and protector, whereas Edgar and the Fool add to Lear's madness in many ways, as we have just seen.

This kind of "guidance" displayed by Edgar and the Fool, and which Edgar also offers his father later on, has always

been associated with ancient religions. Virgil had already played the "spiritual guide" to Dante in The Divine Comedy, and Karl Jung termed such a figure the "psychopomp" of mystery religions.

Laing also touches on this idea. The function played by Edgar and the Fool in King Lear can be compared to what Laing calls "an initiation ceremonial" through which the person on the verge of madness will be guided "further into inner space and time and back again" by people who have already made the journey.[11] Indeed, Edgar and the Fool have undergone the process: the one by an imposed necessity of self-defense, the other by the force of his profession.

This journey into madness, opening Lear's self up in the fullest sense to the whole of existence, is an experience that he must go through "in order to reach a higher state of evolution."[12] Gloucester also has to face this journey, not exactly through madness--even though he laments, "I am almost mad myself" (III.iv.156)--but through much suffering and blindness. Like Lear, Gloucester has not been able to discern true love and loyalty from lies and treason in the guise of flattery. Vain and proud, he is too much concerned with the imaginary wound Edgar has given him to question for a moment Edmund's words. He makes destitute his true, good son and has to pay for this error.

But the punishment is perhaps too cruel as compared to the crime, for Gloucester is not a bad person after all. He feels sorry for Kent in the stocks and remains loyal to Lear throughout the play. He pities the old king's situation and does his best to help him, but Gloucester cannot see that his own problem is similar to Lear's--he has misjudged his good son and favoured the bad one, as Lear has done with his daughters.

After the blinding, however, Gloucester begins to see things "feelingly," and the scene at "Dover cliff" represents a change of attitude in him, one which is born of self-questioning in the face of suffering. More than a physical guide to lead him to Dover, Gloucester needs a spiritual mentor to keep up his spirits and his faith in "the gods " And he happens to find both things in one person, Edgar, the son he has wronged.

I have already said that King Lear is the most "Laingian" of the four tragedies studied in this dissertation. Indeed, more than anywhere else, the familial and political conflicts in this play emanate from the reality of a world based on "violence masquerading as love,"[13] and bound toward destruction in the guise of love and protection. Lear is not able to see that his daughters' love and respect are but masks that they put on as long as they can have some profit from this pretense. When Lear has symbolically destituted himself of power (for he still insists on being called king and on being obeyed), Goneril and Regan choose not to notice this and take off their masks, showing themselves in their true, monstrous natures. This drives Lear to despair:

> . . . 'twas this flesh begot
> Those pelican daughters.
> (III.iv.71-72)

Society is corrupt here, as it was in Hamlet. The chain of being is broken in many ways: children rebel against their fathers (Cordelia herself, Goneril, Regan and Edmund), and there is also father against child (Lear and Gloucester); brothers and sisters come into conflict with each other (Edmund and Edgar, Goneril and Regan); Goneril plots her husband's death; and subjects and servants challenge their lords' authority (Kent, and Cornwall's servant). The macrocosm also reflects

corruption in the furious storm that echoes Lear's madness throughout the central scenes of the play. The critic Keneth Muir briefly summarizes this idea:

> The madness of the elements, the professional madness of the fool, the feigned madness of Edgar, and the madness of the king himself together exemplify the break-up of society and the threat to the universe under the impact of ingratitude and treachery.[14]

Lear himself had always been part of this corrupt society; corrupted by flattery, and flattered because of his absolute power. He realizes this only when it is already too late —"I am a man more sinned against than sinning." (III.ii.59-60)

The social "values" on which Lear's authority once rested are hostile not only to his own being, but also to the survival of society itself. Laing says about modern man that,

> Only by the most outrageous violation of ourselves have we achieved our capacity to live in relative adjustment to a civilization apparently driven to its own destruction.[15]

This is also true of Lear; he had long been adjusted to self-destruction in a corrupt society, and it is only through madness that he can get freed from this "adjustment." Kenneth Muir says that,

> precisely because he is mad, Lear is freed from the conventional attitudes of society. He is able . . . to see more clearly and piercingly than the sane because the sane buy their peace of mind by adjusting themselves to the received ideas of society.[16]

Lear had once accepted the ideas received from society, but now he questions them, and it is actually beneficial that his "peace of mind" becomes disturbed. If mental equilibrium is to be obtained at the price of blindness toward the possibility of annihilation--and we must not forget that Gloucester also confesses "I stumbled when I saw" (IV.i.20)--then, obviously, sanity is more destructive than madness. This is, I

believe, the main lesson to be learnt from King Lear, and a very modern one, too.

Lear had been led in his voyage into madness by Edgar and the Fool. In the end, it is Cordelia, with her kind nursery, who brings him back; she also works as a "guide." (Indeed, she had been the one who first tried to open his eyes to the truth when she refused to accept the "double-kind.") This is perhaps a hint to reinforce the well-known idea that Cordelia and the Fool are somehow related in this tragedy, as if they were "doubles," or mutually complementary characters. It has even been suggested that the Fool is actually Cordelia in disguise, for they never appear together on the stage.

Shakespeare's Elizabethan audience would certainly have been pleased to see Lear restored to sanity according to the contemporary beliefs, that is, through the therapeutic of sleep, repose and music, all signifying a return to nature. Cordelia administers all these to her father with the doctor's orientation, and Lear is finally brought back to consciousness. He recognizes his wronged daughter and asks her forgiveness, kneeling before her. Their reconciliation is so perfect that Lear does not care about being made prisoner at the end of the battle.

> . . . Come, let's away to prison.
> We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage.
> When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
> And ask of thee forgiveness. So we'll live,
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
> At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
> Talk of Court news. And we'll talk with them too,
> Who loses and who wins, who's in, who's out,
> And take upon 's the mystery of things
> As if we were God's spies. And we'll wear out,
> In a walled prison, packs and sects of great ones
> That ebb and flow by the moon.
>
> (V.iii.8-19)

Lear has been purged of his faults and one might rightly think that he has already had enough punishment. Yet, this is not "the promised end"; much more horror and suffering are about to come. That is why Dr. Johnson and most critics of Shakespeare have always felt uneasy about this play.

Goneril poisons Regan and kills herself; Edgar fights and kills his brother Edmund in single combat, and, when everything seems to be under control, Lear comes in bearing Cordelia dead in his arms. "Howl, howl, howl, howl! . . . She's gone forever!" (V.iii.252-259) But, in spite of these words, Lear retains the illusion that she may be alive, and he goes through the tests with the feather and the looking-glass.

In the beginning of this chapter I have said that Lear dies broken-hearted by Cordelia's side. I do not mean that he died in sorrow; instead, as Bradley puts it, "the agony in which he actually dies is one not of pain but of ecstasy."[17] Edgar's report about his father can also apply to Lear: at the thought that he has seen Cordelia's lips move, his old, weary heart "bursts smilingly."

> Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,
> Look there, look there!
>
> (V.iii.310-311)

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

[1]See Chapter Two: 2.3.2 - The Grotesque in Madness.

[2]See Chapter One: 1.2 - Review of Criticism.

[3]Sinfield, op. cit., p. 4.

[4]Ibid., p. 7.

[5]Ibid., p. 13.

[6]P.E., p. 166.

[7]DS, p. 42.

[8]Ibid., p. 34.

[9]Barber, op. cit., p. 4.

[10]See Chapter Two: 2.3.1 - Madmen and Fools.

[11]P.E., p. 128.

[12]Ibid., p. 159.

[13]Ibid., p. 58.

[14]Kenneth Muir, "Madness in King Lear," in Shakespeare Survey, ed. Alardyce Nicoll (London: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 35.

[15]P.E., p. 76.

[16]Muir, op. cit., p. 38.

[17]Bradley, op. cit., p. 241.

CHAPTER SIX

MACBETH

Macbeth is the fourth and last tragedy to be studied in this dissertation. Most critics agree that it was written about 1606, when many of Shakespeare's greatest plays were already behind him. As in King Lear, Shakespeare turned to ancient British history for a theme and chose the career of a Scottish king recounted in Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles. As in all of his great tragedies, Shakespeare is here concerned with the study of character and with motivations. Critics have seen in Macbeth a concentration upon the theme of ambition, or upon the manifestations of fear and guilt in man. It is perhaps more accurate to say that Shakespeare is mainly interested in the corroding effects produced when his protagonist chooses evil as his good. A short summary of the plot is useful.

Macbeth is the story of an ambitious man and his wife who, to expedite three witches' half-fulfilled prophecies, murder their king and kinsman, Duncan, while he is staying as a guest in their castle. Malcolm and Donalbain, the king's sons, flee from Scotland for fear of being also murdered, and Macbeth is proclaimed king. The nobleman Banquo, who had also been present at the meeting with the witches, becomes very suspicious about Macbeth, who hires some murderers to kill him. As the witches had said that Banquo would be the father of many kings, Macbeth decides to have Banquo's son killed too, but Fleance manages to escape. For a second time, Macbeth sees the witches, who warn him against Macduff, the Thane of Fife;

but, nevertheless, they persuade Macbeth to go on, saying that "none of woman born" can harm him, and that he will not be defeated till Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane. Meanwhile, Macduff has fled to England to help Malcolm in collecting an army to fight the tyrant, and in his absence his family is slaughtered by order of Macbeth.

Lady Macbeth, much disturbed in her mind, walks in her sleep and discloses the horrible murder of Duncan. She dies, while a force led on my Malcolm and with English support is beseiging Macbeth's castle. The tyrant realizes that his position is desperate, but he never loses courage, even when he finds that the witches' words have deceived him--Malcolm has ordered each soldier to carry a bough while approaching the castle, and the forest does seem to move. Inverness surrenders with little resistence to the English forces, and Macbeth is killed in a hand-to-hand to fight with Macduff, who had been "from his mother's womb untimely ripped," therefore not born of woman. Malcolm then becomes king of Scotland.

This is indeed a very short summary of the tragedy, but I intend to expand it while commenting on the character of Macbeth. Generally speaking, Macbeth can be divided into two main parts, or movements. The first one, where we can see Macbeth rising to the throne, includes Banquo's murder, which is the climax of the play. The second part implies a downward movement for the hero, his fall from power and consequent death. There are other very important elements which reinforce this division, for instance, Macbeth's growth towards his final freedom from guilt, as opposed to his wife's gradually succumbing to remorse. I will begin by discussing the first part of the tragedy.

When the play opens, Macbeth is spoken of as brave and noble, and Duncan calls him "valiant cousin" and "worthy

gentleman." He is a hero come home from war, an essentially good man who risked his life in defense of Scotland. But, as the tone of the whole play goes, Macbeth's character is also "foul and fair." Although he is not wholly bad, he is ambitious and lusts for power. Undoubtedly, he has thought about his chances of gaining the throne for, under the laws of Scotland, he may be chosen to succeed Duncan. But Macbeth shrinks from the violence required to seize the throne and is willing to show patience and wait.

> If Chance will have me King, why, Chance may crown me,
> Without my stir.
>
> (I.iii.143)

It is only when Duncan nominates Malcolm as his successor that Macbeth is ripe for murder.

"The ripeness is all," says Edgar in King Lear, but it is not so much so in Macbeth, at least throughout the first part of the play. Macbeth himself agrees that he has many reasons for not killing Duncan--he is at the same time the king's courtier, kinsman and host (I.vii). He knows that he is challenging all laws of nature with such a monstrous deed, for Duncan is a good and virtuous king, loved by his people. Perhaps the idea that is lurking here is the same used by Shakespeare in Hamlet, the image of regicide as a symbol of Patricide. Of course, things were more explicit in the former tragedy--Claudius actually was Hamlet's step-father. But we can see the same suggestion also in Macbeth, especially if we keep in mind the Elizabethan love for universal order and for "the chain of being." The king, as head of the country (body politic) would be usually compared to a father, whose family was represented by the people. According to this view, Duncan is a father in Scotland, and Macbeth is perhaps his dearest son (the king calls Malcolm "our eldest," not "dearest"). It is bitterly ironic, as it is in King Lear, that the most favoured

son, the host and kinsman of the king, should later tear to pieces the hand which has fed him.

Macbeth has all these things in mind when he thinks about murder. He longs for power, for the fulfilment of the "all-hail" prediction, but he also worries about the consequences of his act.

> If it were done when 'tis done, then 't were well
> It were done quickly: if the assassination
> Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
> With it surcease success;
>
> (I.vii.1-4)

It is clear that Macbeth knows his murderous act not to be a thing existing alone and complete in itself, but which leads to other things. He shows a deep feeling for the infinite when he thinks about the life to come. However, that life would be ruined forever after the crime. He is in a very similar situation to Lear's, who wants to take an arbitrary action without being willing to face its consequences.

Thus, Macbeth hesitates. He has the ambition but lacks the strength of purpose which would be effective for his act. Even when the murder has been performed, Macbeth's guilt-stricken conscience is a trouble that much embarrasses Lady Macbeth and himself. He comes back from the king's chamber appalled with terror. He has seen a bleeding dagger leading him on and has heard a voice cry against the deed (II.i.33-34; II.ii.34-35). These hallucinations, the product of Macbeth's tormented mind, are the first manifestations of the madness that will later make him bolder.

Macbeth's madness is but the result of an uncontrolled ambition, stimulated by the hero's intense desire for the infinite. Macbeth longs for power and for some kind of freedom and security that might be found beyond the boundaries of common human morality, beyond good and evil. Longing for the infinite seems to be a more-or-less constant preoccupation

with Shakespeare's heroes, either in the form of a good name left behind (as with Hamlet and Othello), or like Lear, through a continuation in children. Macbeth also worries about this, but there seems to be no hope for him--he has no children who might inherit the throne, nor has he built up "a good name" to leave behind. He longs for the infinite, but the means he has chosen to obtain it sharply contradicts the very essence of his longing. He has altered the processes of nature; he has, in the Elizabethan terminology, broken the chain of being. Thus, Macbeth brings chaos into the world--we are told of horses that ate each other, of an owl that killed a falcon and of many other "unnatural" things.

One of the most significant images associated with altering the normal order of things is that of "speeding time," that is, of things being done precipitously, before the due time. Duncan is untimely killed, for Macbeth does not want to wait till "Chance may crown" him. Banquo, Lady Macduff and her children all have the same fate. Besides, there is also the image of Macduff being untimely ripped from his mother's womb. This fact acquires a special significance when we remember that Macduff is the one whom the witches tell Macbeth to beware. Macbeth alters the normal progress of time, and he will later be defeated by a man who has already done the same, that is, who was prematurely born. The second apparition shown by the witches represented a bloody child, who obviously stands for Macduff at birth. In the end, the bloody child proves to be "more potent" (IV.i.76) than Macbeth, whose "armed head" came as the first apparition.

Macbeth's obsession with blood and guilt shows clearly that throughout this first part of his development, he cannot help feeling unsafe. There are gouts of blood in the dagger he sees, Duncan's golden blood is the wine of life which runs

off from the body. Also, Macbeth is worried by the bloodstains on his hands.

> Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
> Clean from my hand?
>
> (II.ii.59-60)

But of all images connected with blood, the one which Macbeth is most worried about is perhaps that of Banquo's family line, his descendants, to whom the witches had also promised kingship. Anguished by the idea that he has been given a fruitless crown (III.i), Macbeth decides for the murders of Banquo and his son. Of course, he has many uneasy feelings about this crime, for Banquo is a true friend of his and a good companion in war; but in spite of this, the murder is performed, and Macbeth thinks he is then in a safe position. But, on the contrary, this is the moment when his position is most shaky, and his guilt comes upon him in a most horrible form. Banquo's bleeding ghost comes to haunt Macbeth at the banquet table, and the new king completely loses his nerve. "Never shake thy gory locks at me," he cries to the ghost, and, a little later,

> Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves
> Shall never tremble.
>
> (III.iv.102-3)

Macbeth is terrified at the sight of the ghost which the others do not seem to see. Indeed, as it was not the case with the ghost of "buried Denmark," which was also seen by Hamlet's friends besides himself, this one in Macbeth seems to be a true hallucination of the hero's vacillating mind. Nevertheless, it is not easy to say precisely whether the apparitions in this play are intended as simple projections caused by mental derangement, or as actual manifestations of a supernatural power working as a curative (theurapeutic) process to restore Macbeth to his own, true "self." The knights invited for the banquet think him to be, if not mad, at least deeply perturbed, but Lady Macbeth manages to calm them by saying that the king's

strange behaviour is but "a thing of custom." She also cannot see the apparition, but she does suspect what is going on and reproaches her husband severely for his fear: "Are you a man?" (III.iv.58)

Lady Macbeth is made of a harder stuff than her husband, at least it seems to be so during the first part of the play. The idea of becoming queen sweeps her away with ambition. She is willing to choke every good impulse that might keep Macbeth from taking "the nearest way" to the throne.

> Hie thee hither,
> That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,
> And chastise with the valour of my tongue
> All that impedes thee from the golden round.
> (I.v.23-26)

If it were not for her, who is always at his side in moments of vacillation, Macbeth would certainly have succumbed to the weight of his guilty conscience. Strange and ironic as it may seem, it is actually she who is ultimately tormented by remorse. Here, in the first part of the play's development, Lady Macbeth is portrayed as a strong woman who deliberately chooses to follow an evil course for the fulfilment of her ambition. She invokes the powers of darkness to be her aids and pushes her husband on when he hesitates.

> Art thou afeard
> To be the same in thine own act and valour
> As thou art in desire?
> (I.vii,39-41)

She complains that he has the ambition but lacks "the illness should attend it." (I.v.18)

This state of things persists until the murder of Banquo and the appearance of his ghost. Up to this point we observe primarily a meek and hesitating Macbeth who is constantly being encouraged by his bold, dynamic wife. From then on, however, things begin to change. When the banquet scene is over, Lady Macbeth disappears from the stage only to be seen again in the

last act, deranged in mind and walking in her sleep. Macbeth, on the contrary, becomes bolder and advances in his crimes defiantly, developing more and more into an abnormal and total lack of guilt. When the ghost has vanished and the lords have gone, Macbeth realizes that

> I am in blood
> Stepped in so far, that, should I wade no more,
> Returning were as tedious as go o'er.
> (III.iv.136-38)

He goes to the witches for a second time, and they show him apparitions which speak by enigmas. Confident that the devil can speak true, Macbeth vows that in the future he will not stop to think on the consequences of his deeds; he will act at the very moment of conceiving the action. (IV.i.146-48) After this, Macbeth's touches of humanity become rarer. He coldly orders the slaughter of Macduff's family, as if simply to accord with his vow, and without the least reason. This horrible deed closes, so to speak, the first part of the play. To parody Edmund (King Lear, V.ii), the wheel has come "half-circle" for Macbeth. He has now overcome his inhibitions and is ready to accept whatever may come. And what is still there to come for him is but the loss of everything he has--his wife, his power and his life.

It is important to notice that this development of his into a psycopathic state of mind where conscience and guilt mean almost nothing, sharply contrasts with the simultaneous movement followed by his wife. Lady Macbeth, who was formerly more determined and more audacious than her husband, becomes gradually oppressed by remorse, and unburdens her guilty conscience in the sleep-walking scene. A change in their characters had already been hinted at in the play, more precisely, when the murder of Banquo was being planned. Macbeth decides to have the lord killed without disclosing his intention to

his wife; maybe he wants to spare her from the responsibility of one more crime.

> Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
> Till thou applaud the deed.
> (III.ii.46-47)

The development followed by Macbeth and his lady suggests a kind of "see-saw" movement--as he goes up towards his freedom from guilt, she descends, unable to bear the weight of her crimes. This is a very interesting point which reinforces Dr. Jekel's theory about Macbeth and Lady Macbeth being but one psychic entity portrayed in two characters.[1]

Moreover, Macbeth's movement in the first part of the play is also related to R. D. Laing's ideas about "primary ontological security." The hero develops a psychotic state of mind very similar to that of an ontologically insecure person. As Laing says,

> in the individual whose own being is secure in the primary experientaal sense, relatedness with others is gratifying; whereas the ontologically insecure person is preoccupied with preserving rather than gratifying himself.[2]

Attitudes of self-preservation are obviously present in Macbeth throughout the tragedy. He has achieved his position through crime and he knows that he can only keep it by using the same means. Thus he arranges the murders of Banquo and Fleance, for fear that in the future his position might be threatened. The slaughter of Macduff's family follows the same line: Macbeth wants to prove, perhaps even to himself, that he can do whatever he wants without being menaced. He lives under a spell and no one can defeat him, not even Macduff, he believes.

Thus, Macbeth chooses his own way of crime and murder, advancing more and more in both and also in madness, till there is a total inversion of values for him. Once again,

"fair is foul and foul is fair"; what is good for Macbeth will always be but destruction and horror for other people. Again, we are reminded of Laing's words:

> Such an individual, for whom the elements of the world are coming to have, or have come to have, a different hierarchy of significance from that of the ordinary person, is beginning, as we say, to "live in a world of his own," or has already come to do so.[3]

Indeed, Macbeth begins to live in a world of his own. He refrains from human contact, lest his identity as king should be threatened. When the first part of the play ends, Macbeth is driven into his castle of Dunsinane, not to leave it till the end of the play. He has no more friends by his side, only servants, messengers, and attendants. Lady Macbeth cannot be with him, either, for she has lost her strength and succumbed to guilt and remorse. Macbeth realizes that he has

> . . . lived long enough: my way of life
> Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf;
> And that which should accompany old age,
> As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
> I must not look to have.
>
> (V.iii.22-26)

The only person who can still be seen at Macbeth's side in the last half of the play is Seyton, a more trusted servant to whom Macbeth swears he will fight even though hope has gone. Curiously, Seyton's name reminds one of "Satan," but, like Oswald in King Lear, Macbeth's servant proves to be loyal to his lord.

This second part of the tragedy, which opens with Malcolm and Macduff's meeting in England, is structurally different from the first one. Here things happen much more quickly than before. Except for the very opening scene, where we see Malcolm and Macduff for nearly 250 lines on the stage, all the other scenes are very short and compact, succeeding swiftly one after the other (none of them has more than 60 lines). This fact adds to the idea of "leaping time" already discussed.

It is as if Shakespeare wanted to show the full force of the reaction provoked by Macbeth's crimes by visually impressing his audience with the quick succession of various different scenes. But, in general, the whole play moves rapidly and directly. Its ultimate power depends on its unswerving movement, but it becomes accentuated in this last part.

This movement runs parallel with Macbeth's development towards his final freedom from guilt. We have already seen that, as the play advances, Macbeth gradually changes, slowly coming out of a long and victorious battle with his conscience. In Laing's terms, Macbeth develops from a position of ontological insecurity into one of total security. This is only possible, though, because Macbeth has adopted a thoroughly different hierarchy of values from that of other persons. He has chosen a course of evil, crime, and blood, and he must keep pace with his choice. "Blood will have blood," he says (III.iv iv), and it is from then on that Macbeth begins to change. Had he not accepted this as the only way he could follow, Macbeth would have become actually psychotic, again in Laing's terms.

Laing points out that Shakespeare's heroes are never truly psychotic, because their sense of personal identity fully contradicts their sense of evil; that is, the "self" is always healthy and valid and opposed to "evil." This idea seems to be in direct contradiction to Macbeth's behaviour, for he becomes a criminal and welcomes evil of his own free will. How can a man who has a firm sense of his own self and value willingly accept and even spread evil throughout society, and still be a tragic hero?

One must not forget, however, that what one means by "evil" in this tragedy is not what Macbeth means by it. Through the total inversion of values which takes place in

Macbeth's life, his good becomes society's evil, and vice-versa. Therefore, his sense of his own healthy self is not in contradiction with society's evil (which is his good), but with society's good, prosperity and peace, which are, for him, evil. Maybe this is a little confusing, but I hope I can make it clearer. Things have come to such a situation in Scotland that Macbeth can only feel happy, safe, and complete when there is "evil" in society; that is,he himself is,like Claudius, "the canker of . . . nature" (Hamlet, v.ii) which must be eliminated if the country is to meet its peace and prosperity again.

Macbeth throws the state into chaos; he brings destruction, death and horror to the life of his countrymen. However, since he obtains the crown of Scotland by these means, he can only regard them as "good," or at least as helpful devices in his ascent to power. Therefore, what Macbeth's countrymen understand as "foul" is, for him, "fair." For instance, Duncan and Banquo are, in the eyes of the Scottish people, victims of Macbeth's ambition; for Macbeth himself they are threats, enemies who can jeopardize his existence and his position. This is why "fair is foul" and "foul is fair."

Yet, Shakespeare does not make a monster of Macbeth. To have done so would have robbed him of any sympathy and removed him from the area of tragic interest. In spite of all the evil, destruction and chaos which he causes, Macbeth still is the hero of the tragedy, and remains sympathetic to us. We still have for him, at the end of the play, the same kind of admiration that we felt in the beginning, when the "bleeding Captain" reported that "brave Macbeth, disdaining Fortune," fought like "Valour's minion" till his sword "smoked with bloody execution." (I.ii)

Macbeth remains sympathetic to our eyes because, when he confronts Macduff, he is again the same man who had faced the

king of Norway and the rebels in the beginning of the play. As the result of an extreme ambition he has almost lost his sense of his own reality and identity; but, in the end, he is himself again. Macbeth has acquired tragic recognition through the realization of his own flaw, and thus he can accept his fate. This realization first comes to Macbeth's mind when a messenger tells him that Birnam Wood "began to move." Macbeth begins to doubt "th' equivocation of the fiend," and confesses his weariness of life. He is not afraid of death, but he will fight bravely, as he had always done before.

> Blow, wind! come wrack!
> At least we'll die with harness on our back!
> (V.v.50-51)

The last moment of recognition for Macbeth comes when he finally faces Macduff in the end of the play. Macduff has just told him that he was not "of woman born," and Macbeth realizes his deception:

> And be these juggling fiends no more believed,
> That palter with us in a double sense,
> That keep the word of promise to our ear,
> And break it to our hope.
> (V.viii.18-21)

Macbeth decides he will not fight Macduff for he has lost all hope; but he has not lost, however, his sense of personal identity and his love of himself. Therefore, when Macduff calls him "coward," Macbeth reacts to it with the same valour which had granted him Duncan's and our own admiration in the beginning.

Macbeth dies, but he dies bravely, with "his hurts before." He has been able to overcome his own doubts and conflicts, and his insecurity, which, being gone, he is a man again. Lionel Trilling, whom Laing quotes in The Divided Self, says that "the captains and kings and lovers and clowns of Shakespeare are alive and complete before they die."[4] Macbeth

is himself again when he confronts Macduff, and, being a tragic hero, he finally comes to terms with the world and accepts death.

As the hero of a Shakespearean tragedy, Macbeth obviously reminds one of Bradley's words. There is in him a "marked one-sidedness" which predisposes him in a particular direction, and he is incapable of resisting this force. This predisposition is determined, as we have seen, by Macbeth's extreme ambition, his passion for power and his desire for the infinite. This is Macbeth's tragic trait, a "fatal gift," as Bradley says, but it is precisely where his greatness lies, raising him "above the average level of humanity." In Bradley's words, Macbeth is "built on the grand scale"; but he is also the only one of the four heroes here analysed who admits his villainy openly. Shakespeare's tragic heroes are not necessarily "good," but even so they can win our sympathy in their errors.[5]

Macbeth is a criminal. Duncan's murder is the first foul deed in a long series which unseats the whole society from its proper order. Chaos spreads through the "macrocosm," having had as its starting point the "microcosm," Macbeth himself. In spite of the witches, he had "a brain and a heart to breed it in" (King Lear, I.ii); in spite of his wife, it was he who first thought of murder.

> Why do I yield to that suggestion
> Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
> And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
> Against the use of nature?
> (I.iii.134-37)

Once Macbeth has his mind made up, he never stops. He is the rotten apple amidst the good ones in the basket, that is, the subversive element who destroys the harmony of society. Whereas Hamlet, Lear and also Othello, to a certain extent, strive

to restore to normality a subverted society, Macbeth does the opposite. This is his tragic flaw, which he admits but does not give up.

However, in spite of being portrayed as a criminal and a tyrant, Macbeth still remains sympathetic to our eyes. He is the very center of the play, around which everything else revolves; the play is his. The other characters cannot reach the heights of his greatness. They are dull and common people kept at secondary level to serve as foils to Macbeth's wit and initiative. King Duncan, for instance, is taken to be an old man, and appears in the play to be honourable, trusting and humble in carrying out the duties of his position. But he is too trusting, too ready to accept what seems to be true.

> There is no art
> To find the mind's construction in the face.
> (I.iv.11-12)

This is Duncan's particular difficulty: he is powerless when he has to face evil, and he puts himself gently and meekly into the hands of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. He has proved to be fatally easy ground for his followers to plant their ambitions in. Banquo, too, is portrayed like Duncan. He trusts too readily in appearances, and when he has the confirmation of his suspicions about Macbeth, he does nothing. Perhaps he is satisfied for the moment to watch events, and he is also much concerned about the witches' prophecies. But he is given no time, and pays with his life for his inaction.

Enid Welsford adds to this view when she says that "on the whole, Shakespeare tends to give more intellectual ability to his sinners than to his saints."[6] But, however dull and insipid they may be, the secondary characters in Macbeth are good and honest people who do not deserve the evil that Macbeth brings into their lives. And it is precisely here that

this tragedy diverges from Laing's ideas about the mad person being a symptom and a victim of a sick society.

The world of the play is portrayed as a healthy body whose members function in perfect harmony. Duncan, the "head," is a good king, and Malcolm is his rightful heir; Banquo and Macduff are loyal subjects who bear calm and normal lives with their families, and the state problems are quickly and efficiently solved. (The rebels are punished and the enemy defeated.) Scotland is a prosperous and happy kingdom; there is no kind of oppression against which Macbeth might rightly revolt. On the contrary, he is loved and honoured in his country as he himself realizes.

> He hath honoured me of late; and I have bought
> Golden opinions from all sorts of people
> Which should be worn now in their newest gloss,
> Not cast aside so soon.
>
> (I.vii.32-35)

Macbeth speaks of reputation as if it were a piece of clothing, an image which is recurrent throughout the play. He says that he should not ignore the recent honours that have fallen on him, as one puts aside a new piece of clothing without having used it. But his "vaulting ambition" would not give him a moment's peace, and Lady Macbeth's words finally convince him. Like a cancer that suddenly spreads throughout a man's healthy body, Macbeth brings chaos into the "body politic" by killing the king, the head of this body. He is the sickness which infects Scotland's health.

This is in direct opposition to Laing's view, where madness is seen as the individual's embodiment, in exaggerated forms, of society's self-division. Thus the mad person becomes a split person, one who maintains a system of "false selves" in order to deal with a world he fears and repudiates, a world, in Laign's words, "gone mad."[7] In essence, what Laing is saying is that individuals become sick because the

world is sick. This is obviously not the case with Macbeth. There are no divisions, no evils and no threats in the play's society (only dullness). It is only when Macbeth is initiated in his foul practices that the world goes mad.

Thus, although the problem of ontological insecurity is, as we have seen, easily identified in Macbeth, this other part of the "Laingian" pattern does not seem to fit. Indeed, the view of madness as revelation and cure, or as potential salvation for the evils of the world, which we have proved valid in the other tragedies, is positively foreign to the madness which is shown in Macbeth. Throughout the first part of the play, Macbeth displays a very marked schizoid tendency. His unmeasurable ambition and his desire for power, by coming into direct conflict with the claims of his conscience, bring him to the very edge of a psychotic experience. Macbeth is driven into temporary madness, but he is able to overcome it in the end. He realizes his flaws and faults and finally yields to the laws of natural order which he himself had attempted to destroy. Through the process of tragic recognition, Macbeth "gathers himself up" again, so to speak, and advances resolutely towards his inevitable end.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

[1]See Chapter One; 1.2 - Review of Criticism.

[2]Laing, DS, p. 42.

[3]Ibid., p. 43.

[4]Ibid., p. 40.

[5]Bradley, op. cit., pp. 13 and ff.

[6]Welsford, op. oit., p. 259.

[7]Laing, P.E., p. 65.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has dealt with the theme of madness as it is depicted in the four major tragedies of Shakespeare. Madness is a very broad subject, but I have tried to restrict my discussion to three main aspects.

Firstly, through an analysis based both on Elizabethan knowledge and on modern criticism, I have tried to show that Shakespeare's heroes are psychologically individualized; they display very specific characteristics in their mental derangements. Conventional psychoanalysis would probably classify Hamlet, for instance, as a manic-depressive type, driving his deep melancholy from his Oedipal complex, as we have already seen. Othello is always classified within the limits of repressed homosexuality, and Macbeth as a megalomaniac and a paranoic. Still another kind of jealous, Oedipal love can be attributed to Lear in connection with his daughters, especially Cordelia.

But I have not attempted a deeper search into this kind of analysis, jumping it over, so to speak, to a more contemporary interpretation--and this is what I chose to call the Laingian pattern. Thus, my second interest in this dissertation has been to try to enclose Shakespeare's heroes within this pattern. We have seen the concept of ontological insecurity, which is a person's not feeling at ease in the real world. I have also discussed Laing's idea of the therapeutic function of madness, particularly visible in Shakespeare's tragedies. None of the heroes becomes truly psychotic; they are all able to pull themselves free of madness through tragic recognition.

Laing has been called a social analyst; he questions the standard concepts of "sanity" and "normality" in the modern society, pointing out that the so-called "madman" is sometimes even saner than the "normal" people around him. This idea has also proved adaptable (at least in part) to the tragedies studied here. The societies depicted in these plays reflect the Elizabethan environment of Shakespeare's time and, except for Macbeth, they also fit Laing's view about our modern world.

Thirdly, from all that has been said in this dissertation, I hope it has become clear that Shakespeare's deep insight into human nature enabled him to transcend his own time, so to speak, and to investigate problems which are still being discussed today.

Besides analysing these three main aspects, I have also tried to answer some pervading questions which are related to them. Are Shakespeare's madmen victims of cosmological disorder? Which forms can madness assume? Can it work as a process of purification for the madman? Is it essentially bad for him, then? The answers to such questions have been tentatively posed by the whole body of this dissertation. Here, they can be but summarized.

As we have seen, the Elizabethans believed that cosmological disorder had an intimate relationship with all kinds of abnormalities in human behaviour, and madness was one of these. They saw madness as a symbol of that universal chaos that might alter the natural order of the chain of being. Shakespeare's heroes obviously fit this belief. We have seen that the four tragedies studied here abound in instances of chaos and disorder, either cosmological, political, familial, or individual. And individual disorder is usually presented in terms of madness.

The forms which madness can assume are determined, in Shakespeare's plays, by the images associated with it. Images of Nature and Folly, for instance, are paramount in Hamlet's and Lear's cases, where they actually assume the natural role of the fool. There are also images connected with sex, which are recurrent in Othello, as well as in the other tragedies: adultery, incest, jealousy, etc., are themes which abound in these plays. As for Macbeth, his very peculiar madness is always linked to ambition, will for power, crime, guilt, supernatural forces, etc.

As we have already seen, one of the main points of the Laingian pattern discussed in this dissertation is the therapeutic function of madness. Thus, madness can work as a cure for other evils and, as a consequence, it proves beneficial for the person in question. All the tragedies studied here attest this fact, specifically King Lear, where the old king acquires a deeper sense of himself and of the world through madness.

Yet, despite the fact that all the tragedies are adaptable to the Laingian pattern, each of them presents a very distinct form of adaptation. This is so because, as we have already seen, madness is displayed differently from play to play. Each hero presents very definite and specific characteristics.

Hamlet's melancholy character predisposes him to a madness of grief, and he comes to assume a feigned distraction the better to conceal his plan of revenge and his own deep disgust. The antic disposition he puts on finds its analogies in images of clothing and masking which are associated both with the hypocrisies of society and with the social function of the fool. Hamlet plays the fool and the madman to reveal society to itself, as Laing puts it.

Claudius' attempt to send Hamlet away from Denmark reflects society's attitude of marginalizing madmen, which is

still very common in modern civilization, where the insane are confined within the gates of asylums, hospitals and clinics. Modern psychiatrists like Laing are now trying to change this attitude.

Othello, as we have seen, is vain and proud of himself as a soldier, but very insecure on the plane of human relationships, especially love. His savage madness of sexual jealousy is brought about by Iago's skilfully exploring this insecurity, and the consequences of this attitude are terrible and irreversible. On the other hand, Iago's excessive coolness and rationality are also signs of his peculiar kind of madness, for while Othello grows all "heart," Iago determines to be all "head"; this is also a break in the normal balance, as any Elizabethan would have agreed.

Lear's madness comes over his mind as the storm descends over the macrocosm of the play and war upon the body politic. Madness is everywhere in King Lear, and it works as a process of purification, both for Lear himself and for society, which is thus deprived of its hypocritical conventions and has a chance of facing a better future when the play is over. Gloucester is also purified of his faults through madness, but it is Edgar's "madness" and not his own that purges him.

Thus, in King Lear, madness cures people of other evils which, in Shakespeare's view and also in Laing's, are worse for men than mental derangement itself: pride, vanity, despotism, flattery, ambition, etc.

We have seen that Macbeth does not wholly fit the "Laingian" pattern which has been central to this dissertation. The hero is certainly ontologically insecure in his development towards psychosis, but the Scottish society is not corrupt as in the other tragedies. It is healthy and peaceful, and it is Macbeth who brings chaos into it. However, his

madness, born out of his unmeasurable ambition and his will for power, still differs from those of the other heroes. It leads him into a course of crime and horror, which none of the others ever pursued.

But in spite of being terribly riddled by conflicts and of undergoing unbearable sufferings and madness, Shakespeare's heroes are always able to recover in the end, because they acquire tragic recognition. Placed above average humanity, they manage to come out of their torments bettered by pain and even greater than before. None of them is allowed to escape death, but theirs is always a heroic death, which they accept with honour and courage.

It has also been said that although Shakespeare depicted four different societies in these tragedies, he obviously had the Elizabethan stereotype in mind. The images associated with madness are precisely those which any Elizabethan would have believed, as are the superstitions, the philosophical and medical theories, the religious beliefs, sociological and political ideas, etc.

Nevertheless, Shakespeare was unusually aware of the failure of contemporary schemata to account for the whole of human nature. Thus, in practice, he transcends any schematized contemporary ideas of madness, and is quite modern in the way he creates and treats his mad characters. That is why Shakespeare's heroes can be called "Laingian," as they have been called "Erasmian," "Freudian," "Jungian," etc. As Kenneth Muir has well pointed out:

> Shakespeare's depiction of madness, though based no doubt on sixteenth-century theory, has satisfied medical opinion of later ages. . . . Our increasing knowledge of madness during the past century has served only to justify Shakespeare's intuitions.*

*Muir, op. cit., p. 30.

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