A MAD OR SAD PRINCE? A PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF ONE OF SHAKESPEARE'S MOST FAMOUS CHARACTERS

by

HAYLEE PURDUE

A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Human Physiology
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Science

June 2023

An Abstract of the Thesis of

Haylee Purdue for the degree of Bachelor of Science
in the Department of Human Physiology to be taken June 2023

Title: A Mad or Sad Prince? A Psychological Evaluation of One of Shakespeare's Most Famous Characters

Approved: _____ *Brent Dawson, Ph.D.*_____
Primary Thesis Advisor

Often considered one of the most influential and most quotable pieces of William Shakespeare's repertoire, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, has stood the test of time. Analyzed by high school and college students for countless decades, *Hamlet* epitomizes the quintessential revenge plot, with Hamlet, himself, cast as the titular hero, who supposedly descends into madness over the course of the play. However, I disagree with this commonly accepted trajectory for Hamlet's character. I believe that there is an alternative explanation for Hamlet's confusing behavior during the five dramatic acts. I argue that the swift change in Hamlet's familial, romantic, and personal lives led to an onset of depression that can shed light on why Hamlet acts the way he does throughout the play. Using literary strategies like close reading, historical contextualization, and Freudian analysis, this thesis will provide a clear addition to the Shakespearean conversation and offer an argument as to why Hamlet is neither acting mad, nor insane, but is instead depressed. To justify my claims, I will also define psychological and medicinal terminology from the 16th and 17th centuries in modern day language, as well as provide a historical contextualization to these terms. After carefully analyzing Hamlet's relationships with the important figures in his life, it can be determined that Hamlet endured a myriad of emotions throughout the play. The most justifiable conclusion to

settle on is that his changing environment impacted his life so negatively that he developed depression symptoms as a means of coping with extreme loss – loss of his family, loss of his love, and loss of himself. This investigation into *Hamlet* revealed that by looking past the commonly recognized labels on characters and applying a psychological, scientific lens, an alternative explanation to a character's actions may be discovered. From a broader perspective, science and literature can be woven together to work in one, interdisciplinary field.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis committee: Professor Brent Dawson and Professor Barbara Mossberg, for agreeing to accompany, help, and guide me during this busy process. Dr. B, thank you for giving me confidence in my writing. The comments you left me in your classes gave me the assurance I needed to write this thesis. Professor Dawson, firstly thank you for agreeing to work with me, a human physiology major, who wanted to write about *Hamlet.* Secondly, thank you for listening to my sometimes zany opinions about the text and teaching me along the way. I could not have completed this thesis without either of your support.

I would also like to thank my high school AP Literature teacher Mrs. Kathleen McElliott, who first taught me *Hamlet,* how to effectively write, and how to function as a good student. Without your profound impact on my life, I would not be the student I am today.

Connor, thank you for your patience with me during the last 20 weeks as I have welcomed Hamlet into our lives, as if he were a real person. I'm sure you know the play as well as I do now, with as much as I bring it up at dinner. Thank you for being as generous, as kind, as supportive, and as fantastically goofy as you are. I wouldn't have made it through without you.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family for their immense support not only during my thesis process, but during college as an entirety. To my dad, who always listens to whatever activity I happen to have involved myself in and for agreeing to read my long thesis, even though he is not a Shakespeare guy. To my mom, for always reading, commenting, and fixing any part of my thesis that I might send to her at random times. Thank you for listening to all the stressed out phone calls, reassuring me that everything was going to work out. It helped more than you can imagine. Thank you to the rest of my family: Matthew, both sets of grandparents. You all make up my mile-wide support system and without you all, I could not thrive. Thank you.

Table of Contents

Introduction & Background

William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* is one of the most frequently taught, recreated, and referenced works of Shakespeare's repertoire. With its many characters and subplots, there is no shortage of interesting things to examine within the play. I first met Hamlet my senior year of high school, in AP Literature. Conflicted on how to feel about the majority of the characters, I spent a considerable amount of time pondering whether I even liked Hamlet as a person. After I graduated high school and entered college as a Human Physiology major, my world became consumed with chemistry, biology, anatomy, and physiology classes, but I longed to enter the world of literature again. During my sophomore year of college, after declaring a minor in English and rereading *Hamlet* in Dr. Brent Dawson's "Shakespeare's World" class, my previous frustrations with Hamlet were reignited, but this time with a new sympathy for the character. What if Hamlet was not as obnoxious as I thought? What if Hamlet was not putting on a fanciful façade and was instead mentally broken individual? What if there was something *wrong?* With my new, science-focused lens, these questions sparked my investigation as I launched into the world of Hamlet's psyche, yearning to uncover what was indeed going on inside the mind of Hamlet.

Set in the Elsinore, a castle in Denmark, Act 1 of *Hamlet* opens with the palace soldiers, Marcellus and Barnardo, and Horatio, a school friend of Hamlet's, observing a ghost-like apparition in the Danish air. They say the ghost bears a striking resemblance to the late King of Denmark, Hamlet's father. The ghost of Old King Hamlet then tells his son to avenge his murder by killing the new king, Claudius, Hamlet's uncle, who has since married Gertrude, Hamlet's mother. Hamlet, plagued with sadness and anger, contemplates suicide and plots revenge on his uncle. Fearing for his life, Claudius retaliates and schemes his own revenge, laying the

groundwork for the revenge plot of the play. As the Elsinore's residents grow involved in the drama, intrigue ensues. In Act 2, Gertrude sends Hamlet's childhood friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to spy on him. Polonius, Claudius's chief counselor, tries to instigate romance between his daughter, Ophelia, and Hamlet. In Act 3, to prove his uncle's guilt, Hamlet prepares a play called a dumb-show that presents a brother killing a king, allowing Hamlet to show his family what happened to his father, thus verifying Claudius' guilt. After the dumb-show has concluded, the ghost of Old King Hamlet returns and after a conversation he has with Hamlet, Hamlet accidentally stabs and kills Polonius. In Act 4, Hamlet travels to London and with his absence and his denial of her love, Ophelia dies. The audience learns of the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern offstage. Finally, in a dramatic Act 5, after her tragic death, Hamlet confesses he loved Ophelia. Laertes, Ophelia's brother, in cahoots with Claudius, challenges Hamlet to a duel, with the hope of killing Hamlet. Claudius offers Gertrude a poisoned filled cup, she dies, Hamlet stabs Claudius, he dies, and Laertes and Hamlet both die from their fatal wounds to one another as the play tragically concludes.

Many scholars have noted Hamlet's potential feigned insanity or "crazy" persona he displays throughout the dramatic events of the play (Davis, 630). Some say his Freudian mess of a family situation and the revenge plot led to his descent into madness, as it is often described, but I disagree with this label for Hamlet's emotional state (Hill, 371). I argue that the swift and dramatic shifts in Hamlet's familial, romantic, and personal lives led to an onset of depression that explains his actions throughout all five acts of the play. His depression is, of course, not a justification for murder, but it can shed light on why Hamlet acts in such manners. My thesis will offer an addition to the Shakespearean conversation and provide a clear argument as to why Hamlet is neither acting mad, nor insane, but is instead depressed. It will also seek to define

certain terms from psychology and medicine in the 16th and 17th centuries in modern day language, as well as provide historical and literary contextualization to justify my claims.

A Brief Contextualization of Elizabethan Medicine & Psychology

During Shakespeare's lifetime, which is commonly recognized to span from 1564 – 1616 (Lyon, 2015), medicine was a far cry from the advanced technology that we know today. Archaic practices like bloodletting patients, a process involving the removal of blood for ailments as treatment, cauterizing amputations, and the belief that herbs, plants, and flowers were a cure-all, all were considered the standard procedures of the time. Despite the fact there was little to no scientific merit to these practices, they were considered commonplace during the Elizabethan era. Additionally, knowledge of the human body was based entirely on humoral theory. The humors were defined as four fluids flowing throughout the body that controlled one's complexion, personality, and overall disposition. According to Elizabethans, there was an overall balance to these humors that would ensure mental and physical health: one quarter phlegm, one sixteenth choler, and one sixty-fourth melancholy, and the rest blood (Lyon, 2015). These humors fed into the individual's mental well-being – an Elizabethan psychology. Humoral theory was later debunked by germ theory, which modern medicine still follows today. Finally, modern psychology was not established until the mid-19th century by Wilhelm Wundt, however studies of human behavior, neuroscience, and a general want to capture how the mind works dates back to Aristotle and Hippocrates (Brown, 11). Psychological terms from hundreds of years ago have ebbed and flowed in definitions, so it is important to acknowledge how they have evolved with the changing times and medical discoveries. The psychological terms I have selected to analyze *Hamlet* stem from both the Elizabethan era and from modern day psychology. In doing so, throughout the first chapter of my thesis I have supplied definitions of the vague terminology

used in psychological medicine, as well as provided a smaller vernacular to use throughout my analysis of *Hamlet.*

My Rationale

When selecting the six terms I would be using to analyze Hamlet, I did my best to utilize the broadest of psychological ailments that have been used in clinical settings and that could be applied to *Hamlet*, while keeping in mind that many of these terms have constantly evolving definitions. I considered adding additional terms like lunacy, bipolar disorder, or subsets of depression, but rejected them because they were either psychologically too specific or no longer psychologically relevant enough to suit my argument, despite the fact that they might be mentioned in the play. Due to this, I avoided using terms like "crazy" or "lunatic," as these are clinical diagnoses that I determined were not necessary for my analysis. Moreover, it is important to highlight that many of the terms I selected have a certain degree of intersection, depending on the individual afflicted with these conditions, but I will be using them as separate entities, given that there is a set symptom list for the majority of them, and that Hamlet is a fictional character. Finally, it is vital to note that I will be using melancholia and depression as effectively synonymous terms given their extreme amount of overlap in symptoms, the fact that melancholia is no longer a clinically used term, and that it has been replaced with depression in most settings.

Chapter One.

Melancholia

Before addressing Hamlet's mental state, it is imperative to fully define and contextualize the vast array of psychological terms that will be mentioned in this thesis. Some of them are relatively similar, others have minute differences that are important to pick apart when looking at Hamlet's psyche. One of the most widely mentioned terms in my thesis is melancholy, or melancholia, which Hamlet himself, states that he endures throughout the play. Melancholia is no longer considered a diagnosable mental illness, but before 21st century medicine, melancholy was a vague, but widely accepted sickness. "Melancholia before the twentieth century: fear and sorrow or partial insanity?" by Diogo Telles-Correia and João Gama Marques, for example, covers the ever fluctuating definition of melancholia. Telles-Correia and Marques explain that the origin of the term stems from the Greek works for "black" and "bile," alluding to the fact that, up until the 18th century, a person perceived as a melancholic would have been diagnosed with an excess of black bile. During this time, black bile was conceived as one of the four bodily humors, the other three consisting of yellow bile (choleric), blood, (sanguine), and phlegm (phlegmatic). Various character traits were typically associated with each of the humors. As Telles-Correia and Marques state, Galen, the ancient Greek physician, declared that melancholics exhibited symptoms ranging from fear to sadness, what modern day medicine would consider signs of depression. Scholars during the 17th century noted the hyperactive imaginations of diagnosed melancholics (Correia, 2). After the end of the 18th century, there was a strong shift in defining melancholia, as Telles-Correia and Marques note. A new term was coined in psychology, "monomania," or delusions caused by one object that led to partial insanity. A specific subset of this monomania is depression, which Telles-Correia and Marques interpret as a

redefinition of the ancient term melancholia. It is important to note that this is one of the first times that the terms "depressive" and "insanity" are used, and even more importantly, linked to melancholia. Finally, over the course of the 19th and the 20th centuries, melancholy gradually was replaced with the term depression, except in severe cases. As stated previously, I will be using melancholia and depression synonymously, as the terms have evolved into meaning nearly the same thing in a clinical sense.

Mania & Delirium

Another one of the terms frequently brought into the psychological conversation is mania, or a manic state of being. According to Kenneth Kendler's paper "The Origin of Our Modern Concept of Depression – The History of Melancholia From 1780-1880," mania was originally coined as "lypemania," which was effectively synonymous with melancholia during the late 17th and early 18th centuries (Kendler, 864). Symptoms of this so-called "lypemania" ranged from "partial [to] chronic delirium" and "passions of a sad, debilitating or oppressive character" (Kendler, 864) to moments of overactivity and passions. This initial definition is not dissimilar to the one of melancholia that Telles-Correia and Marques proposed, but in the mid 1800's, there was a movement amongst psychiatrists to stop using lypemania, melancholia, and the aforementioned monomania, synonymously, and instead draw slight psychological differences between each of these maladies, from a clinical perspective. Psychiatrists sought to conceptually differentiate the previously defined melancholia with their newly defined ailment of chronic melancholia. Chronic melancholia still sustained the previous symptoms of down trodden mood, fear, and sadness, but an important distinction is made when noting the concept of the intellectual part of the brain. One's intellect, wits, and general faculties would remain fully intact when diagnosed with chronic or regular melancholia. However, when plagued with mania

or another new subcategory called chronic delirium, the intellectual part of the mind would cease to function, as it is "an essential part of the disorder" (Kendler, 864). This distinction between the functional, intellectual part of the mind proves vital to this thesis, as Hamlet's logic, reasoning skills, and sense of humor remains intact, despite the fact that he endures a variety of symptoms that can be categorized as Kendler's chronic melancholia.

Insanity & Madness

An important nuance to the terms melancholia and mania is insanity. To a modern day reader, one may presume that this term is synonymous with acting "crazy" or perhaps even certain mental illnesses like bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. However, as the specific etymologies and histories of these psychological terms are unveiled, insanity can be also seen in a new light. According to Kendler's paper, insanity can actually be described as an "alienation of the mind," (Kendler, 864) and it even goes as far as to state that, historically speaking, partial insanity could result in certain degrees of intellectual dysfunction, similar to delirium and mania. This aspect of mental functionality is one of the sole dividing factors between insanity and melancholia and mania, thus potentially illuminating why Hamlet's quippy attitude remains intact throughout the play. Furthermore, it is important to note that there is a very fine line between insanity and the proverbial madness Hamlet descends into throughout the play. Certain scholars, like Kendler, tie insanity and madness together so tightly, it is difficult to untangle their differences. Other psychological historians however, have noted that madness deserves a nuanced definition of its own. According to Oswaldo Salaverry, madness originated with Thomas Willis (1621 – 1675), father of neurology, who believed that poorly filtered blood to the brain could lead to false ideas and ". . . chaotic action of those spirits in the mind [who] could reach the muscles and then explain the strange movements and actions characterized by the

mentally ill" (Salaverry, 146). Albeit not medically accurate, this evaluation fueled other 17th century physicians to offer their own opinions of madness, some saying that it was associated with hypochondria, the subtle commentary being that it was simply "all in the patient's head," others saying that it was a serious mental condition, where there were literally stones in the individuals' heads, inspiring many paintings and famous artworks portraying "stones of madness" (Salaverry, 146). Based on the archaic medical treatment most patients received during this time, it can be assumed that most cases were not actually hypochondria, and were instead other disorders that were misdiagnosed or mislabeled.

Depression

As previously outlined, many of the aforementioned terms used are relatively old diagnoses that would not be used to describe individuals today. An exception to this, and one of the main terms included in my argument about *Hamlet*, is depression. Sometimes described as a modern day definition of melancholia, individuals who endure depression oftentimes show similar symptoms of melancholics: an overwhelming feeling of sadness, downtrodden mood, difficulty making decisions, lethargy, guilt, loss of interest in hobbies, and in extreme cases thoughts of suicide (Jansson, 399). Of course, it has been proven that humoral theory cannot be substantiated, but the symptom parallels between melancholics and depressed individuals are certainly present. Moreover, depression is a all-encompassing term in psychological medicine, so it is important to acknowledge that it can range from broad forms like major depressive disorder, where an individual can experience depression symptoms for a minimum of two weeks, and persistent depressive disorder, where severe symptoms can last at least two years, to more specific subcategories like seasonal affective disorder, where one's mood falls during the autumn and winter months, and even depression laced with psychosis symptoms, where the individual

may experience hallucinations or delusions (NIH, 2023). Despite the fact that there are so many subsets of depression, for my thesis, I will be analyzing *Hamlet* using the generalized term of depression, meaning that the individual can experience any or all of these mentioned symptoms. My goal is not to diagnose Hamlet with a specific type of depression, but instead provide an alternate explanation to why Hamlet acts the way he does, that explanation being depression.

Literature Review

When delving into Shakespearean criticism, there are far too many Shakespeare scholars to count. Many people have devoted their lives to analyzing Shakespeare's language, characters, and productions. Their research has illuminated various interpretations of Shakespeare's sonnets and plays, especially *Hamlet.* Similar to other fields of literature research, it is important to remember that new analyses are published every day; yesterday's *Hamlet* may not be tomorrow's *Hamlet*. Many of these works use close reading, historical contextualization, and psychological analysis to examine Hamlet's personality, while a handful of them delve into Freudian theory to explain the facets of his character. An analysis and investigation into the previous literature examining Hamlet's character will provide the additional insights needed to complete this thesis.

With the terminology fully defined, it is easier to examine the work of scholars who address madness and melancholia in Shakespeare's plays, and in *Hamlet* particularly. Many academics approach *Hamlet* from a more interdisciplinary perspective, applying a medical and psychological lens to his character. For instance, W. F. Bynum and Michael Neve, from "Hamlet is a kind of touchstone by which to measure changing opinion—psychiatric and otherwise—about madness" and Joe Keener in "Evolving Hamlet: Brains, Behavior, and the Bard" both focus on the scientific implications found within *Hamlet*, specifically when focusing on Hamlet

as a melancholic character. Bynum and Neve state that time and time again, psychiatrists have confidently diagnosed Hamlet as a manic depressive, after examining both his melancholic and manic tendencies, but the main critique of this argument lies with whether or not Hamlet feigned his ailment. As Bynum and Neve explain, some physicians have argued that the interplay between feigned madness and real melancholia is a sure sign of mental instability and mental illness. I agree with Bynum and Neve's assessment of Hamlet's mental illness. However, the many ambiguous scenes where Hamlet informs the audience that he may begin acting differently, which could indicate madness, as Bynum and Neve stated, I do not think an explanation for Hamlet's actions, given the contextualization of the rest of the play. Utilizing a different persona, merely to cope with the changing times is something that melancholic individuals experience, as Joe Keener explains in his paper. Moreover, using an evolutionary perspective, Joe Keener explains Hamlet's melancholia, stating that the manifestation of melancholia was a defense mechanism against the ever changing environment in Denmark. This melancholic state activated the survival instinct; melancholia was simply a reaction to depressing times. Keener argues that it is basic evolution at play here and Hamlet simply needed a coping mechanism. Additionally, literary scholars have used melancholy to explain various components of Hamlet's character, defining key moments throughout the play. For example, A. B. Shaw and Neil Pickering's work "Depressive illness delayed Hamlet's revenge" uses close reading to identify Hamlet's melancholy. They state that Hamlet did indeed endure mental illness throughout the play and it was actually this illness that ruined his character. Hamlet consistently cannot act on his thoughts, something that Shaw and Pickering discuss as a character flaw and a key aspect in defining Hamlet as with acute depression. Others have also picked up on Hamlet's delay to act on his revenge. For instance, A. C. Bradley's book, *Shakespearean Tragedy Lectures*

on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, uses close reading to explain Hamlet's general indecisiveness and overall noncommittal nature during critical moments of the plot. Bradley explains that it is indeed melancholy at work, depressing Hamlet, triggering his indecision and his unawareness as to why this is happening. Interestingly, Bradley notes that from a psychological perspective, the play revolves around melancholy, but it does not outweigh the tragedy of *Hamlet* itself. For my thesis, it is of value to consider that perhaps the tragedy of Hamlet actually lies with the analysis of a man with a melancholic, depressive illness, in a terrible situation.

Another facet of literary scholarship that is important to cover is the Freudian theory utilized to decipher *Hamlet*. Freud's fundamental work, *Mourning and Melancholia*, for instance, explains the deeper psychological correlation between these two terms. Freud defines mourning as not just the death of a loved one and the expected grief and sadness that follows, but a general departure from a normalcy of life. Melancholia, Freud explains, can actually exist as a distinct entity from mourning: the melancholic's ego (a Freudian concept defined as where the conscious mind lives, the reality principle) loses all worth, and the melancholic "vilifies himself and expects to he cast out and punished" (Freud 245). When fraught with melancholy, the conscious mind loses all sense of reality, judgment, and perception, devolving into what Freud claims is an ill state. To conclude his assessment of the ailment, Freud establishes that melancholy does indeed draw some of its characteristics from mourning, indicating that the two entities are psychologically linked. For my thesis, the sense of loss Hamlet experiences and mourns throughout the play is pivotal to analyzing the depression and melancholia he experiences.

Furthermore, Shakespearean scholars, like Stephen Reid, have used Freudian analysis to examine the layers of Hamlet's psyche. Reid uses close reading and his own interpretation of *Mourning and Melancholia* to argue that Hamlet's melancholia can be dissected into to more or less two key points during the play: first, the Oedipal relationship between Hamlet and his mother and second, Hamlet's loss of Ophelia. After the death of his father, Hamlet's relationship with his mother clouds when she marries her dead husband's brother, and when Hamlet discovers that she had been cheating on her late husband the whole time, he spirals into what Reid labels as melancholia. The fact that Hamlet now has to share his mother's affections with his uncle, as well, during a time when he should be grieving with his mother over their shared loss, only adds fuel to the fire, manifesting even more melancholia within Hamlet. Furthermore, in Act 2, Ophelia appears, and acting strangely mad, informs Hamlet that she will no longer be in contact with him. The disappearance of Ophelia, paired with the discovery of the adultery is too much for Hamlet to endure. Reid states that these two events are laced with such Freudian implications that they are what triggered Hamlet's melancholia, leading to the famous "to be, or not to be" speech at the beginning of Act 3, which Reid states is the "quintessence of melancholia" (Reid 393). Applying a Freudian lens to certain elements of *Hamlet* can prove pivotal to unveiling previously ambiguous facets of the characters.

By defining the terminology that will be used frequently throughout my thesis and examining the previous literature on this subject, my thesis can connect the close reading techniques, consideration of the historical context, and Freudian analysis in order to evaluate Hamlet's mental state. Based on these scholarly approaches, I will be able to add to the Shakespearean conversation, illuminating how Hamlet is not feigning his ailment at all and is indeed depressed.

Glossary

1. Delirium: Symptoms include: lack of intellect, reasoning, and inability of the mind's functionality, with strong parallels with mania.

2. Depression: Symptoms include: feelings of sadness, low mood, difficulty making decisions, lethargy, guilt, thoughts of suicide. It is clinically used today with various subcategories.

3. Insanity: It can be described as an 'alienated mind' and would result in high degrees of intellectual dysfunction.

4. Madness: It is sometimes associated with hypochondria, but is more frequently closely tied with insanity. Based on medical histories/symptoms, it can be assumed that man individuals were labeled as mad when they were not.

5. Melancholia: Symptoms include: fear sadness, and overactive imagination, but it is no longer a diagnosable mental illness and is synonymous with modern depression.

6. Mania: Symptoms include: moments of passions, sadness, or overactivity, and it overlaps with delirium in that intellect is at a deficit.

Chapter Two.

My Rationale for Hamlet Analysis

Upon determining how I was going to divide my analysis of *Hamlet*; I decided that the best methodology for my thesis would be to examine Hamlet's relationships with the important figures in his life and how he acts towards them. As it is with any Shakespearean text, many of the passages are open to interpretation and there may be many viable explanations due to evolving language and varying denotations of words. That being said, with my analysis, I strove to utilize the six terms expressed previously in Chapter One, connecting them to the passages I felt best contributed to my argument.

Hamlet & His Family

Throughout the play, Hamlet's relationships with all of his family members – both alive and dead – are strained, resulting in not only family drama for the audience, but in multiple uncomfortable and emotional situations for the royals of Denmark. With the death of Old King Hamlet fresh, Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, wastes no time getting over the death of her husband, and marries her late husband's brother, Claudius. In mere months, she has mourned, moved on, and remarried. Her son, on the other hand, did not take the remarriage of his mother well, crying out early in Act 1 "She married. O must wicked speed, to post / With such dexterity to incestuous sheets! / It is not nor it cannot come to good. But it break my heart, for I must hold my tongue" (1.2.156-159). The diction of both "wicked" and "speed" paired together reveal how distraught Hamlet truly was about the rather swift union of his uncle and his mother. For a young man like Hamlet, the dissolution of his parents' marriage led to an insurmountable level of grief – one that he describes as "wicked." The connotation of the word leads to a vile comparison, between his mother and all things sinful; Hamlet's mind sickened by the sheer thought of his mother and

father no longer existing in matrimony. His heart is broken, his soul is consumed by anguish, silencing his mind and numbing his thoughts. Moreover, the last line in this soliloquy is an allusion to the fact that unspoken griefs undoubtedly lead to a broken heart. Hamlet is grieving more than just the death of his father; he has metaphorically lost his mother to his uncle. As Reid mentioned in his analysis of *Mourning and Melancholia,* the fact that Hamlet has to share his mother's attention with his uncle, during a time when he and Gertrude should be grieving together over their loss, manifests even more melancholia. All in a matter of a few months, life as he knew it ceased to exist, and for which, in this soliloquy, Hamlet's heart breaks. Hamlet's mourning for normalcy leads to his overwhelming melancholia, referencing the notion expressed in Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia*. The losses piled up, one after the other, and they were too much for Hamlet to bear, driving him further into his pit of despair. These depressed thoughts are not those of one who is acting, perhaps to put on a façade, or to get attention, they are one who is truly upset with life. Here, in Act 1, Hamlet expresses not madness, but a sad, quiet acknowledgement of the fact that this new normal will never live up to what it was. In addition to highlighting the alarming haste that Claudius and Gertrude were married, Hamlet notes the disturbing nature of their union. He describes "such dexterity to incestuous sheets" (1.2.157) and foreshadows a speech from the ghost of Old King Hamlet in Act 1, scene 5, where he tells Hamlet "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!" (1.5.42-45). Both father and son reference the incest that occurred as a result of Claudius' and Gertrude's marriage, stressing the Freudian horror that has become Hamlet's life. His uncle is now his step-father, and his mother, in a sense, has become his aunt. This is an uncomfortable situation, both for the audience and for Hamlet. Furthermore, Old King Hamlet calls Claudius an "adulterate beast"

(1.5.42) alluding to the fact that Gertrude may have been disloyal in their marriage. Pointing out the animalistic, unevolved, and simply carnal tendency of this act, Old King Hamlet calls Claudius a "beast." Interestingly, he does not point blame on his wife, but vilifies Claudius and in an alliterative final line, states that Claudius seduced his wife. Upon learning that his uncle tempted his mother and that his mother obliged, Hamlet's sense of normal unwinds again. Ordinary life is gone, his family is broken, leading Hamlet into a spiral throughout the rest of the play. After Hamlet thoroughly unravels, contemplating suicide, and yearning for an escape from his parental drama, he has a brief moment of uncharacteristic climatic decisiveness. He yells at his mother and kills Polonius. Rather than describing this as a feigned descension into madness for dramatic flair, this moment with his mother is actually highlights Hamlet's mental clarity.

Right after Hamlet stabs and kills Polonius in Act 3, he confronts Gertrude about his true feelings regarding her union with his uncle. Emotions already running high, Hamlet piles the verbal attack on to Gertrude, calling the marriage corrupt, sick, and points out that marrying the man that killed her husband was nearly as bad as killing Polonius. This naturally does not excuse Hamlet's cruel act, as murder is never acceptable, but in this verbal sparring war, Hamlet spared no expense. Gertrude retaliates, remarking seemingly to no one, "Alas, he is mad" (3.4.105). There are two viable denotations of the word "mad" in this short line: the first being the assumption that Hamlet is insane, similar to the aforementioned definition of madness. The second, however, is more substantiated, considering how truly upsetting this entire ordeal has been for Hamlet. Hamlet is not mad, he is angry in this scene, expressing the range of emotions from the previous three acts of the play, as a means of coping with them. Just because he is experiencing loss, anger, sadness, and grief, does not mean that he cannot function properly. In

fact, Hamlet himself, points out this out in his continued retaliation to his mother, logically pointing out:

> My pulse as yours doth keep time
> And makes as healthful music. It is not madness
> That I have uttered. Bring me to the test,
> Would gambol from. Mother, for love of grace,
> Lay not that flattering unction to your soul,
> That not your trespass but my madness speaks.
> It will but skin and film the ulcerous place
> Whiles rank corruption, mining all within,
> Infects unsee. Confess yourself to heaven,
> Repent what's past, avoid what is to come,
> And do not spread the compost on the weeds (3.4.140-152)

The musical metaphor Hamlet creates here elucidates the fact that he is indeed not acting mad at all, as she previously suggested. In fact, he is just as sane as she is. Albeit not the most calming pacification to Gertrude, Hamlet, with the utmost clarity of mind, goes on to explain to her that he could rephrase the sentiment, which a mad man would not be able to complete. Despite sounding like a minor argument, Hamlet is not incorrect; partial insanity could result in intellectual deficits in the mind. According to Kenneth Kendler, insanity would result in an "alienation of the mind" (Kendler 864), resulting in an ailment similar to mania or delirium. Kendler's assessment allows one to see that Hamlet is neither insane nor delirious. His intellect is fully intact; his snarky attitude remains fully functional throughout the entirety of this scene. He is able to explain the heinous act of his mother's marriage and how if she wants to save herself from the "corruption" and vices of Claudius, she must repent and confess her incestuous sins to heaven, and therefore Hamlet's thinking is fully intact. That being said, his word choice and tone in this monologue toward his mother still portray how upset he was about her betrayal of his father. Towards the end of Hamlet's verbal attack on his mother, he employs another vicious metaphor to heighten the dangerous significance of Claudius having impact over so many people.

Moreover, the metaphor comparing Claudius' impact on Gertrude's life to a silent infection beneath her skin drives the point home that his impact on her life, Hamlet's life, and the lives of fellow Danes would be detrimental to their welfare. Hamlet carefully alludes to the fact that Denmark is a garden and with Claudius in charge, his sickening "weeds" and association will metaphorically run rampant through both Hamlet's mother and the government, which Hamlet's points out through his reference to corruption. Claudius' guilt and poor management was no surprise though; other individuals in the Elsinore were well aware of Claudius' questionable motives. Hamlet informs Horatio and Marcellus "There's never a villain dwelling in all Denmark / But he's an arrant knave" (1.5.123) and Horatio, almost sarcastically, responds, "There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave / To tell us this" (1.5.124-125). The fact that other people noticed that since Claudius had taken over Old King Hamlet's role, the increase in knavery, corruption, and dishonesty that had befallen the royal court solidifies Hamlet's interpretation of the situation, and thus his mental state of being. His grief and anguish over the death of his father are both certainly still present, but this has neither impacted his ability to assess the situation in front of him, nor has it negatively influenced his want for his mother to rid Claudius from her life. Hamlet's mental competency, despite the sadness he has been feeling for the recent months, justify the solidity of the intellectual part of his brain, negating any claims of madness or delirium. With Claudius' nefarious means infiltrating into his life, Hamlet's relationships with all members of his family, including his mother, start to break, his depression pulling them down even further.

One of the more intriguing characters in *Hamlet*, Gertrude has already been cast as an unfaithful wife and a questionable mother. The audience never hears her side of the story, and she and Hamlet are alone on stage together only once. It remains incredibly unclear as to whether

Gertrude truly loves and wants to protect Hamlet, or if she simply cares about political gain, hence the marriage to Claudius. In a conversation with Claudius, she remarks that Hamlet was seeming "Mad as the sea and the wind, when both contend / Which is the mightier" (4.1.7-8). The image that is created with this metaphor is certainly reminiscent of a certain uncontrollable power, however it does not cast Hamlet as manic, insane, or a raging mad man. The sea and wind are, in theory, two ecological entities that could live harmoniously together. However, as Gertrude implies, there is a certain storminess that arises when they are personified. Rather than madness that the queen alludes to though, it is sad that they have to receive such harsh treatment. Nature against each other is unnatural, uncommon, and uncomfortable – just how Hamlet has been feeling for the previous three acts of the play. Sea of sorrow, wind of woe, pitting them against each other, instead of a madness, creates a whole storm of sadness: a depression. Not mania, not madness, depression. Hamlet's intriguing relationship with his mother in this moving scene in Act 4 is an excellent representation of the close relationships Hamlet has between each of his family members. Interestingly, even though Hamlet carries a large amount of resentment towards his uncle, examining the relationship between Claudius and Hamlet reveals a considerable amount about Hamlet's mental state.

Although he is most commonly viewed as the villain in *Hamlet*, Claudius too played a role in Hamlet's depressive state. Late in Act 3, Hamlet witnesses Claudius, alone, praying about his supposed remorse for killing his brother. Hamlet hears him say "My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent" (3.3.40), offering up the glimmer of sympathy from Hamlet and the audience. This could have been the ideal moment to execute his revenge, to complete the task Old King Hamlet instructed him to, but instead, Hamlet hesitates, stating:

> Now might I do it pat, now a is a-praying,
> And now I'll do't. And so a goes to heaven,

> And so am I revenged. That would be scanned. A villain kills my father, and for that
> I his sole son, do this same villain send to heaven" (3.3.73-78)

Noting specifically the phrase "might do it," Hamlet's lack of action and inability to act on his emotions is not a character flaw, as many critics, like A. B. Shaw and Neil Pickering, have often labeled it, but rather a reaction to the emotional turmoil placed in front of him. Evident that he possesses a strong desire to actually kill his uncle, and is instead merely attempting to act on what his father told him to do, Hamlet jockeys between the two outcomes. In the moment of inaction, Hamlet is so plagued with his own thoughts that he spares his uncle, an individual whom one can infer he hates more than anyone else. It is difficult to blame Hamlet for the way he acted, given that Shakespeare crafted a perfectly dramatic situation: kill the man who killed his father, or kill a completely defenseless man and live with the guilt. Either way, Hamlet was facing a lifetime of guilt, blame, and the responsibility of his actions. Having already been enduring the symptoms of melancholia, guilt would only add to his load, so Hamlet's hesitation was no surprise. Bradley remarks that this moment is a turning point in the play, and marks the "sickening return of melancholic paralysis" for Hamlet (Bradley, 135). As Bradley points out, the "paralysis" is a poignant way of describing Hamlet's lethargic demeanor when he was faced with making a decision about whether to stab his uncle. Lethargy, as one may recall, is a common symptom of general depression, so it comes as no wonder that Hamlet was stagnant, paralyzed even, at the thought of making such a severe decision as this one. This scene marks a transition point in the play for Hamlet; after this moment, his depression causes both harm to himself and those around him. In fact, many people die as a result of his inability to kill Claudius: Polonius by Hamlet's own hand, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Ophelia, Gertrude, Laertes. Hamlet's actions and the deaths of these individuals cannot be excused by his

melancholia and depression, but they certainly can be explained. Act 3 serves as a turning point during the play, where Hamlet's depression begins to impact more than just himself.

Hamlet's father tragically died before the play started, which many, including Bradley and Reid, have estimated as approximately two months before the start of *Hamlet.* Questions of who killed him and why, are not up for debate, but after his death, many quandaries arise. Beginning in Act 1, scene 1 of the play, Horatio, Hamlet's friend from school, Marcellus, and Barnardo, both Elsinore soldiers, report seeing a ghost-like spirit, looking strangely like the late king. For an Elizabethan audience, this would come as no shock; ghosts, apparitions, and elements of the supernatural would have been commonplace on stage. Certain scholars, like W. W. Greg, have countered this historical claim, stating that the ghost was a mere hallucination of Hamlet's, a manifestation of his unsteady and mad emotional disposition. However, Horatio, Marcellus, and Barnardo were all in a sound state of mind, and all three of them witnessed the ghostly figure. After they saw the ghost, they rushed to tell a depressed Hamlet, planting the seed in his mind. Desperately clinging to the thought of seeing his father once more, Hamlet exclaims "For God's love, let me hear" (1.2.196). Hamlet impatiently peppers Horatio for details about the encounter, seemingly yearning for details about his since passed father. The frantic tone of the exchange ends with Hamlet settling on taking watch for the night, with the hopes of catching a glimpse of the Dane-like apparition. When the ghost does indeed appear again, it beckons only to Hamlet, Horatio and Marcellus dubiously declaring that it was too dangerous to trust this strange being. Hamlet ignores their warning, and as he walks off, Horatio pitifully remarks "He waxes desperate with imagination" (1.4.87). Horatio's direct reference to Hamlet's mental state at this point in the play alerts the audience that Hamlet may not be acting with the utmost clarity of mind. Due to the fact that all four individuals see the ghost, calling the ghost a hallucination or

manifestation of Hamlet's subconscious, is not a sufficient explanation of Horatio's remark. However, noting Horatio's usage of the word "imagination" provides a much clearer explanation, when recalling that, as Telles-Correia and Marques noted, melancholics possessed an extensive imagination. There is a substantial difference between manic hallucinations and slipping into delirium, to the point of seeing things that simply are not there, and one's imagination acting as a means of surviving the loss of a family member. Recalling that ghosts were normal for an audience at this time, Horatio, Marcellus, nor Barnardo would ever be considered insane or delusional upon reporting their findings, so why should Hamlet? Imagining his father is an action reminiscent of something a small child could do when they are scared and do not know how to react to a changing circumstance. No one would accuse a small, innocent child, with their imaginary friend, or someone they talk to as a means of feeling or coping with a large, recent change in their lives, as insane. Hamlet is no different than a child who has lost a parent. He needs his father's guidance, love, and support. When it is taken from him, he turns to his imagination, as Horatio puts it, "desperate" for one final conversation with his father. Is seeing his father an innocent coping mechanism, forced upon him by his heavy sadness? Most definitely, but a hallucination crafted by a mad man? No. Hamlet's imagination follows him several times throughout the play, as he has multiple pertinent conversations with his father that feed his depression.

The only character in the play to even speak to the ghost of Old King Hamlet, Hamlet is significantly impacted by his conversations with his father. In a heartbreaking, yet telling goodbye to his son, the ghost of Old King Hamlet remarks "Adieu, adieu, adieu. Remember me" (1.5. 91). With his grief reignited and sadness refueled, in agony, Hamlet cries out:

> Ay thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
> In this distracted globe. Remember thee?

Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past (1.5.96-100)

The specific references Hamlet makes to his memory are all pertinent to unveiling not only the tight bond between father and son, but how truly upset Hamlet had become as a result of his father's passing. This brief conversation Hamlet has with his father grounds him for a fleeting moment, having remarked that he was "distracted" in this "globe" head. With the deafening cacophony of Hamlet's whole world, whole globe, whole theater of Denmark ending around him, plagued with grieving agony, Hamlet was caught in his own head, seemingly forgetting to remember his own father. When his father specifically asks him to do so, Hamlet emphatically repeats not once, but twice, "Remember thee?" almost threatening his father, and himself, about how could he not? Clear his mind of prior knowledge, clear his mind of trivial thoughts; his father's memory is the only thing that matters now. As Hamlet verbally agrees to fulfill Old King Hamlet's last wish, he eerily echoes his father's parting words to him, "Now to my word: / It is 'Adieu, adieu, adieu, remember me.' / I have sworn't" (1.5.110-112). With these words, Hamlet both foreshadows his own very demise, in addition to securing the revenge plot for the rest of the play. With the repetition of the rhetorical "remember thee," Hamlet's tone in this ending speech shifts rapidly from dramatic, to heartbroken, to just plain sad, ending off with a glimpse of his dramatic vengeful side, vowing to kill his uncle. As mentioned previously, the audience knows that in the opportune moment, Hamlet cannot act and instead secures the deaths of nearly everyone around him. The aforementioned paralysis that Bradley mentioned appears again, as Hamlet finds himself unable to kill his uncle. Guilt, lethargy, inaction, grief, and of course, the ever looming thought that his father is never returning are all weighing down on Hamlet in the most extreme way, ultimately cascading him into a state of melancholia and depression for the

following four acts of the play. Hamlet lost more than just his family members during the play though, he loses the girl he was betrothed to as well.

Hamlet & Ophelia

An important subplot to the revenge and politics of revenge occurring throughout the play is Hamlet's tumultuous relationship toward Ophelia. Daughter to Polonius and sister to Laertes, both of whom Hamlet stab and kill in the end, Ophelia is a classic Shakespearean woman: quiet, innocent, governed by the men her in life, and probably deserved better than the hand she was dealt. Regardless, with her father set on marrying her off to the future king of Denmark, Ophelia and Hamlet have a chaotic relationship. While the majority of their relationship unfolds offstage, Hamlet and Ophelia presumably have known one another for quite some time, growing up together in the Elsinore. As Hamlet's mental fortitude slips, his actions towards Ophelia dramatically shift nearly every scene they are together. Their romance abruptly ceases after Ophelia's tragic death in Act 4, which scholars like Barbara Smith presume was by her own hand, claiming it was "neither accident nor [her] intent" (Smith, 96). Albeit an ambiguous death, Ophelia's passing and her presence in Hamlet's life both play an extremely important role in his attempt at coping with his depression, as well as overall mental fortitude.

Not long after Hamlet encounters the ghost of his late father, he runs to Ophelia, who is alone in her private room. It is important to note that there is a certain amount of ambiguity with Hamlet's actions prior to this scene, as Hamlet stated that he was going to start presenting an "antic disposition" (2.1.175) shortly after the conversation he had with Old King Hamlet in Act 1. It has been stated by Lars Kaabaer that this marks the beginning of Hamlet's feigned insanity, however, it is important to note the chronological contextualization of this scene. Prior to this moment, Hamlet had a whole, imagined conversation with his late father and had committed to

kill his uncle on revenge orders from his father. This is quite the string of events to take place in a series of moments. When Hamlet enters Ophelia's private room, he is in a state of emotional distress and lashes out at her. Ophelia, taken aback at Hamlet's unruly interaction with her, informs her father and describes his appearance as:

> Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
> And with a look so piteous in purport
> As if he had been loosèd out of hell
> To speak of horrors – he comes before me (2.1.80-83)

Not only does Ophelia's tone shift into a horrified one at the sight of his unkempt attire, but the language she uses to describe Hamlet's appearance provides an insight into what Hamlet has been coping with in the recent moments. Words like "piteous," "loosèd out of hell," and "horrors" do more than merely describe his physical appearance, they provide a snapshot into Hamlet's mental state. Describing Hamlet as "loosèd out of hell" makes Hamlet seem as if he is a demon or ghost, released from the depths of the evil layers of the underworld. This thought, as Ophelia notes, is horrifying and frightening. His sins caught up with him, and Hamlet descended, not into madness, but into Hell. Elements of the supernatural present itself once again, with the reoccurrence of the ghost or demon imagery in this scene, perhaps providing a parallel between young Hamlet and Old King Hamlet. Furthermore, as an outsider, but someone who still knows Hamlet well, Ophelia's judgment of his appearance can be trusted. She feels bad for him and his "piteous" disposition, making the audience feel simultaneously sorry and embarrassed for him to look in such a state of disarray. One would think that given their relationship, Hamlet would feel comfortable with Ophelia, perhaps even revealing his feelings to her, but instead, Ophelia remarked that Hamlet "took [her] by the wrist and held [her] hard" (2.1.85) and later "He raised a sigh so piteous and profound / As it did seem to shatter all his bulk / And end his being. That

done, he lets [her] go" (2.1.93-95). This is a vastly different side of Hamlet than the audience has seen before. While the audience is seeing it through Ophelia's shaken memory, the Hamlet she describes is far from a healthy man. As stated previously, this scene occurs right after Hamlet interacts with the ghost of his father. Presumably severely frightened and with the reignition of fresh emotions, Hamlet's grieving process is halted. In the wrong place at the wrong time, Ophelia took the brunt of Hamlet's emotional wrath, as he unravels in front of her. While it may look like he is descending into madness in this moment, Ophelia's commentary undoes any sense of madness cast upon Hamlet. Hamlet sighs, shattering all tension in the moment, breaking any anger Hamlet may have felt. The weight of the world has been resting on Hamlet's shoulders and for a brief moment, he vulnerably lets it out, with Ophelia. For a fleeting moment, Hamlet's relationship with Ophelia saved him from the depression he had been coping with.

Moreover, revealing more of Hamlet's emotional instability, after this interaction, Ophelia reveals that in a letter he had written to her, Hamlet had professed his undying love to her. But later, in their next scene on stage together, their relationship takes an interesting turn after the "to be, or not to be speech." Hamlet exclaims to her "I loved you not" (3.1.119) which is quite the verbal slap to Ophelia, and then continues by saying:

> Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a
> breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but
> yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better
> my mother had not borne me (3.1.121-124)

Hamlet's words are cruel, unkind, and uncalled for. They cannot be excused either, but there are underlying dark elements that allude to Hamlet's unstable emotional state. For instance, with the repetition of the "get thee to a nunnery" line in this scene, Hamlet seemingly wants to avoid Ophelia producing offspring that might inherit his uncle and his mother's sinful nature. Hamlet

might fear that his own sins be passed down to his own children as well. There are many moments throughout the play where Hamlet contemplates and recognizes his own sins. Suicide, during this time, was a sin and there is a plethora of times where Hamlet considers suicide. In fact, Hamlet ends the "to be, or not to be" speech with the ominous line "be all my sins remembered" (3.1.90). By having children with Ophelia, it is arguable to state that Hamlet's depressed thoughts, melancholic tendencies, and suicidal sins could be inherited from him, and in an effort to protect both her and his future children, he lashes out. It can be argued that the bitter and harsh language that Hamlet uses to lash out at Ophelia are a sign that Hamlet has truly lost all emotional sanity; abusing someone he loves, not wanting to have children with her, even when juxtaposed with the weighty sigh that Ophelia notes, all complicate Hamlet's emotional state. But as Bradley notes:

> Hamlet's love. . . was not only mingled with bitterness, it was also, like all his healthy feelings, weakened and deadened by his melancholy. It was far from being extinguished; probably it was one of the causes which drove him to force his way to Ophelia; whenever he saw Ophelia, it awoke and, the circumstances being what they were, tormented him (Bradley, 158)

Bradley highlights the precise the emotional turmoil Hamlet would be feeling during this conversation with Ophelia. The unstable nature of their interaction is not explained by any underlying madness on Hamlet's part, but by his deafened emotions. Melancholia has seeped in like a deadly but silent killer, causing Hamlet to treat Ophelia in a way that she did not deserve, driving her away.

Completely broken and perhaps even aware of the terrible things he has said, Hamlet unnervingly alludes to the fact that perhaps it may have been better if he had not been born at all. Not only is this line incredibly sad, but at this point in the play, Hamlet has neither killed anyone, nor has he done anything to the extent of his uncle, making the audience wonder what actions he could be referencing, if any. The simpler justification is that Hamlet is wishing for an easy out, a

way not to live any longer. Again, this is one of Hamlet's more tragic remarks, as wishing one was never born and no longer wanting to live is a sure sign of depression. After this dramatic conversation in Act 3, Ophelia, practically taken out in the wrath of Hamlet's depression is left heartbroken and eventually drowns in the river, taking her own life. Hamlet, reflecting on yet another loss in his life, has a newfound respect for the certainty of life, as a moment of hope for Hamlet arises in the final act of the play.

Finally, in in Act 5, after Ophelia's vague passing, whilst standing in the graveyard with Horatio and the Gravediggers who are digging Ophelia's grave, Hamlet confronts death with less fear, instead accepting its inevitability. Hamlet laments to Horatio:

> Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio, a fellow
> Of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath
> Bore me on his back a thousand times. And now how
> Abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge rises at it
> Here hang those lips that I have kissed I know not how
> Oft. Where be your gibes now? Your gambols, your
> songs, your flashes of merriment that were wont to set
> the table on a roar? (5.1.173-180)

Holding the skull of Yorick, the late court jester, Hamlet quite literally looks death right in the face, something that had brought him fear many times throughout the play. Instead, he broaches the topic with a nostalgic tone, greeting Yorick, whom he knew as a child, as an old friend. Initially, Hamlet is horrified, claiming that it is worse than he imagined it. But as he processes, his thoughts become classic contemplative Hamlet. This is a substantial moment for Hamlet; previously death was seen as an escape from the torment of his life, but now, it is used as a means of reflection of times passed. There are glimmers of hope for Hamlet, glimpses of mental clarity as he recognizes that life cannot be just merriment and laughter. Furthermore, in this moment of lucidity, whilst standing in a grave, he confesses his true feelings for Ophelia. He

exclaims “I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers / Could not with all their quantity of love / Make up my sum” (5.1.258-260). At last, Hamlet seems to have gained clarity about his emotions, having confronted his feelings about death and about Ophelia. With the death of his father so recent, his relationship with Ophelia was put under a large amount of strain, and neither Ophelia nor their relationship survived the turmoil. Only while standing in the graveyard, Hamlet begins to ironically claw his way away from his depression, but unfortunately it was too little too late, given Hamlet’s unfortunate demise at the end of Act 5. Despite the glimpses of hope for Hamlet at the end of the play, Hamlet’s everchanging actions towards Ophelia reveal that his depression was so deeply rooted that it played a severe role in the downfall of his and Ophelia’s relationship. Hamlet uses Ophelia as a coping mechanism and lashes out at her when his life is too difficult to handle by himself. Only after her death does he realize that he loved her all along, but by then it was too late. During their flawed relationship, Hamlet spirals and develops an even more flawed relationship with himself and mental wellness.

Hamlet & Himself

While juggling the relationships with his mother, father, uncle, and betrothed, Hamlet developed a severely ill relationship with himself. While normalcy goes up in flames around him, Hamlet slipped further and further into the deep hole of his mind. Throughout the play, there are countless moments that highlight what Hamlet was thinking, feeling, and in some instances, yearning to escape all thinking and feeling. Though there are potentially instances where the audience sees glimpses of clarity, as Hamlet attempts to explain what has been happening to him during the last handful of months of his life. More frequently though, the audience sees Hamlet seemingly clinging to his wits, grasping at all sense of himself.

Hamlet's first monologue, after it has been revealed that his uncle and mother have been wed, unveils how truly upset Hamlet is about the situation. Hamlet opens with "O that this too too sullied flesh would melt, / Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew" (1.2.129-130). This flesh is his own being, and it is "sullied," dirtied, and soiled, so much so that Hamlet wishes he could melt and dissolve into the morning peaceful dew. Dew, connoted with the new day and pure spring sunrises, is nothing but a calming word. Euphoric sounding, rid of the cacophony of the Elsinore, an image of a simple, calm meadow forms, laden with dewdrops, rain from the previous evening, descending from the heavens, and coating the grass. Sadly though, with dew arises a sad connotation as well. In the morning, dew sparkles with the promise of a new day. However, its beauty vanishes as it evaporates into nothingness. The calamity of Hamlet's life has forced him into wishing he could melt like said dew, which a logical man like Hamlet knows is not possible. So, Hamlet turns to the only other feasible option – in his saddened mind at least: suicide. Hamlet states "Or that the Everlasting had not fixed / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter" (1.2.131-132). What Hamlet thought was a way out of the hell he had been facing was not a way out at all. In fact, it was against religious law during Elizabethan times, so Hamlet was stuck, alone in his torment. Multiple times throughout the play, Hamlet turns to this illegal act, seemingly thinking of it as the only escape from his mental prison, but he is eternally stuck, according to everlasting God himself. A thought like this would have plagued Hamlet, tortured him into sadness; he could not escape his grief. Encompassed by the world he no longer wanted to live in, everything became "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable" (1.2.l33), serving as a reflection upon Hamlet's mental state, in addition to his world. These poignant diction choices reveal Hamlet's melancholia; words like weary, flat, and stale are nearly synonyms of aforementioned depression symptoms like a unhappy mood and downtrodden demeaner.

However, caught between the law and his noble position as the Prince of Denmark, Hamlet finds himself in the trickiest of catch-22's: should he persevere through the barrage of sadness and ever-present melancholia crushing him down, or should he give in, give up, and give way to the depression like so many others before him? Finally, the first portion of this passage concludes with the reappearance of the garden metaphor. Hamlet states "fie on't, ah, fie, 'tis an unweeded garden / That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature / Possess it merely" (1.2.134-136). Again, Hamlet, in this very first look into the inner workings of his mind, has revealed that he views Denmark as a garden that has gone to seed, creating an image in the audience's mind of an unruly, manic, chaotic environment that would be unideal for an individual such as Hamlet who has already been coping with such loss. Foreshadowing Marcellus's famous "something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (1.5.90) line at the end of Act 1, one cannot help but wonder if Hamlet was a victim of his environment. Prior to the death of his father, Hamlet presumably lived a comfortable life – family, friends, a title. But now, with all that turned on its head, Hamlet was kicked into survival mode, and as Joe Keener points out, perhaps the manifestation of Hamlet's melancholia dawned as a result of the everchanging Danish environment, the unweeded garden. Keener even goes so far as to claim that it is basic evolution at play; Hamlet was faced with turmoil, so his brain evolved to cope, even donning his "inky cloak" (1.2.76) to mask his new depressed person as a form of protection (Keener, 154). While stating that Hamlet evolved in a matter of just two months is a tad extreme, it is justifiable to state that Hamlet needed a coping mechanism for his changing environment, and that mechanism was melancholia. Melancholia was the only ailment Hamlet was able to feel in those trying times. Putting on a cloaked persona to cover one's depression does not make one mad.

Still wearing his dark overcoat of sadness and after revealing that suicide was on his mind, Hamlet goes through a series of long soliloquies, after each of which he dives deeper and deeper into his state of depression. The first of these speeches is brought on after Hamlet witnessed the players from the dumb-show portraying more emotion during their scripted lines than Hamlet feels he has shown over the death of his father. He cries out:

> Yet I,
> A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak
> Like a John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
> And can say nothing. No, not for a king,
> Upon whose property and most dear life
> A damned defeat was made. Am I a coward? (2.2.505-510)

Across the board, the language Hamlet uses to describe himself is unkind and cruel, calling himself a "dull muddy-mettled rascal." This alliteratively negative impression he has of himself is riddled with guilt, a symptom of depression. Hamlet knows that he should be feeling more upset and perhaps even, more anguish than he already is. Because he feels as if he is not feeling enough, a cyclical irony, guilt arises. Of course, Hamlet is able to identify what he is feeling and is rather upset by all of it, but he is not able to combat these emotions. Calling himself a John-a-dreams, an aimless, lazy dreamer, he picks up on the lethargic nature and down trodden way he has been feeling. Lethargy, again, presents itself as a symptom of Hamlet's depression – exposing how Hamlet may not be able to help the emotions he has been feeling, seeing as there is a clinical issue taking place. Hamlet even references the clinical nature of his ailment, calling himself "pigeon-liver'd and lacking gall" (2.2.516). Pigeons do not have gallbladders and are an entirely lackluster bird. The gallbladder produces yellow bile, vital to a choleric disposition and recalling humoral theory, any imbalance of the humors could lead to an unwell individual. If Hamlet lacked gall, his other bodily humors would have been imbalance. Other bodily humors

like an excess of black bile – melancholia. Even though humoral theory is not substantiated in modern medicine, Hamlet uses this reference to gall and identification of symptoms to reference his malady by name. He states that "Out of my weakness and my melancholy, / As he is very potent with such spirits, / Abuses me to damn me" (2.2.540-542). This instance is one of two times where a blatant reference to melancholy is ever made, and it is the only time during the play where Hamlet himself references his own sickness. Certain scholars have claimed that the end of this speech is a sure sign of Hamlet's madness, as he vows to not only prove that his uncle is guilty, but fears that he has been manipulated by his dead father (Shaw, 93).They claim that these thoughts are not the thoughts of a sane man. However, it is important to take into account the events leading up to this moment. Hamlet referenced his recent fatigued nature and his inability to care about the world around him, even though he knows he should. With the context of these two factors, Hamlet does not seem like a delirious man on the brink of a nervous breakdown, instead he seems like a sad son, grieving the loss of his father and mourning his lost sense of self. Hamlet's reoccurring grief fueled his characteristic contemplative nature that the audience witnesses several times throughout the play. His insight into his own mind and introspection give way to the famous "to be, or not to be" speech immediately following Hamlet's identification of his depression.

Right after Hamlet comes to terms with his emotional disparity, he launches into his contemplative "to be, or not to be" speech. Chock full of quandaries regarding whether life is worth living, Hamlet opens with a metaphor that exposes how life has been for him lately. He asks:

> To be, or not to be, that is the question:
> Whether it is nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,

Or take arms against a sea of troubles
And opposing them end them (3.1.56-60)

Of course, these lines have been analyzed by nearly every Shakespeare scholar. The two generalized schools of thoughts about this early moment in Act 3, are that either Hamlet was going through an extreme existential crisis, believing initially that suicide was the only escape from the torment of life, or that Hamlet was reflecting about the nature of mankind as an entirety. Given the nature of Hamlet's melancholia and previous suicidal thoughts, this speech explores many of Hamlet's deepest thoughts regarding the severe action. Some have argued that the sea of troubles metaphor is hyperbolic, as Hamlet is essentially listing his grievances with life (Hirsh, 35). However, given the previous two months of his life, it should come as no surprise to the audience that Hamlet feels as if he is waging a war, alone, drowning in his sea of mental troubles. By "opposing" them, Hamlet seemingly is admitting defeat; he can take no more of the relentless calamities of life. Hamlet's self-labeled noble mind has been shut down and absolutely beaten down by the world around him. Interestingly enough though, in Hamlet's final remarks of this speech, he has not reached a final decision on whether life is worth the trouble. Instead, he remarks "thus conscious does make cowards of us all" (3.1.83). In this deeply moving remark, Hamlet actually steers away from suicide, pointing out that after thoroughly evaluating it, something Hamlet does very well, his fear of the finality of the action outweighed the benefits to his mental state. Not only does this substantiate the fact that Hamlet's intellectual mind is fully intact, but it elucidates the fact that Hamlet is scared. Mirroring the sorrowful tone from the "rogue and peasant slave speech," when Hamlet asks "Am I a coward?" (2.2.510), both references to his fear serve as a means of exposing his true anxiety over the tumultuous times. Even though Hamlet chooses not to go through with ending his life, the fear he experiences along the way is expected, given that fear is a classic symptom of melancholia according to

Diogo Telles-Correia and João Gama Marques. Both feeling of drowning in his sorrows and the fear surrounding what he thought was his only option substantiate Hamlet's depression what many claim is his most famous speech. However, preceding these moments, there is a significant conversation between Hamlet and his closest friends that reveals more about Hamlet's depression than any other point in the play.

Before the "rogue and peasant slave" speech and the "to be, or not to be" speech there is an oftentimes overlooked conversation Hamlet has with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The two interchangeable men are Hamlet's closest friends and, in theory, should have his back, regardless of the situation. Hamlet, already downtrodden, is heartbroken when he learns of the betrayal, and informs them "I have of late,—but wherefore I know not —lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises" (2.2.265-267). In his conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet seems genuinely confused about his recent spiral into melancholia, yet he perfectly describes multiple symptoms that parallel the ailment, seemingly admitting to being depressed this entire time. He has lost all sense of happiness and has lost all interest in activities he formerly found interesting. Tragically, he notes that he has lost his "mirth," or joy, like a small child who has lost their favorite plaything and yearns to find it once more. As described previously, both melancholics and depressed individuals experience symptoms identical to these, and in a moment of candor with his two closest friends, he openly admits it. The informal prose Hamlet speaks in during this section highlights to the audience how vulnerable Hamlet is with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, elucidating how vital this moment is with his friends. After initially admitting to his melancholia, Hamlet continues speaking in prose and informs his friends:

> It goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave

> o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire,—why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors (2.2.267-273)

While Hamlet's language and tone may verge on facetious in this conversation, it is important to remember that Hamlet is not flying off the handle, but is instead turning to his two closest friends for help in a moment of utter weakness. As mentioned, this is one of the first moments where Hamlet recognizes that something is truly wrong, mentally. Everything around him is sterile. Even the luxurious life he leads, alluded to carefully via the reference to the stage of the Globe theater, is killing him slowly. The pestilent vapors of the Danish air are seeping in and sucking the life out of Hamlet, tying into Keener's environmental notion again. Certain scholars have argued that this conversation is a mere façade, a spectacle and show of emotion put on, in an attempt to gain sympathy from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, as they both act as a sort of therapist figure for Hamlet in Act 2 of the play (Kaaber, 68), claiming that the embellishments to the stage parallel the emotional embellishments Hamlet supposedly added to his speech to convince his friends that he was suffering from depression. However, considering the treacheries Hamlet has endured and the genuine tone of the opening line, any performative sense in this dialogue fades away, especially when considering the tragic implications of the last line.

As their conversation begins to end, Hamlet concludes by asking, "And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?" (2.2.278). To fully uncover the extent of the tragedy behind this heartbreaking line, the duality of the word quintessence must first be revealed. The modern definition pertaining to the shear embodiment of something, in this instance, dust, stands, but there is an older, Elizabethan definition that pertains to a superior, fifth worldly essence, or element (*OED*), as well. As Hamlet alludes to, when people die, they turn to dust. But with the addition of the word quintessence, turning to dust becomes the ideal. The idea of turning to dust is a frightening notion in the minds of most individuals. However, in Hamlet's mind, when

people die, people like his father, they become this superior fifth element. To join his father and be one with him in the Danish earth would be a comforting idea to Hamlet, but it would come with some rather extreme consequences. The upsetting idea that death is the best option is not lost on Hamlet, as he later debates the pros and cons to continue living. Hamlet, has reason to continue living, and yet when it comes down to it, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, he knows he will eventually end up like Yorick. So, to ask Hamlet's famously tragic question: to be or not to be, when all one is, is ephemeral dust? This is the lowest point in Hamlet's depression during the play, having gained a certain degree of emotional clarity about his ailment, but nearly settling on the decision that suicide may be his only escape from the melancholia he has been feeling for the previous two months. The audience knows that Hamlet does indeed die in the end, but one cannot help but theorize if, in time, Hamlet's emotional unwellness, melancholia, and depression would have caught up with him. The internal and external factors in Hamlet's environment, and unable to cope, Hamlet would have ended his own life, regardless of Laertes' actions. Hamlet's intense melancholia and depression played a severe role on his mental state, revealing again, the larger tragedy in *Hamlet.*

Conclusionary Remarks

After thoroughly reading, analyzing, and considering various perspectives, in addition to my own, it is vital to recognize that using this interdisciplinary lens, a different interpretation of Hamlet's character was revealed. As I demonstrated, there is a vast array of evidence pointing to the fact that Hamlet did indeed endure depression as a means of coping with his losses throughout the play. Combining both science and literature revealed, as stated previously, the larger tragedy in *Hamlet*: a man contemplating the will to live, barely coping with a melancholic, depressive illness.

From a scientific perspective, reading literature is immensely important. While learning about medicine, hard science, or about the plethora of illnesses that may afflict a person, it is easy for everything to become sterile, clinical, and to remove one's self from the fact that there are people attached to each case study read during the learning process, each with a family and their own specific story. Entering into the world of *Hamlet*, despite the fact that the characters are all fictional, allows one to draw parallels between the characters and people, people whom we all probably know, endure the same types of depressed thoughts as Hamlet. Of course, no one is running around trying to kill their uncle, but it serves as a very clear, and more importantly, a very human reminder to the scientific world that reading works of literature, like *Hamlet*, is a vital tool to humanizing the sometimes sterile, unemotional world of science.

Moreover, on the other hand, using psychological medicine to examine the relationships Hamlet has with the various individuals in his life, allows one to see a greater significance and a greater usage of the play. With a text as old as *Hamlet,* some may begin to question its relevance, or why many students still read *Hamlet* or other Shakespearean works. But by examining literature from a psychological perspective, individuals are able to fully examine the relationships they might have with their family members, friends, or other individuals close to them. Using *Hamlet* as a learning tool, one may start to realize how little we truly know about what is going on in their lives. While majority of us do not live in a castle and will never find ourselves caught up in a fabulous revenge plot, most, if not all of us, will know someone who endures depression. As we saw with Hamlet, the symptoms of depression may present themselves in different ways: anger, sadness, lethargy, or perhaps they might present as nothing at all. Realizing this myriad of symptoms forces one to realize how vital it is to check in on those close to them. Shakespeare's famous play becomes an extremely relevant device, encouraging

past, present, and future audiences to take a closer look at the relationships in their lives and the individuals close to them.

The unique approach I brought to *Hamlet* exposed more than just the tragedy in the play though: it revealed that there is no reason why science and literature cannot work together. Both fields have more overlap than perhaps more people realize, woven together in a tight poetry, and for this exact reason, interdisciplinary science is a valid and vital world worth exploring.

.

Bibliography

Bradley, A. C. "Lecture III Shakespeare's Tragic Period—Hamlet." Shakespearean Tragedy Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, 2nd ed., Macmillan and Co., Limited St. Martin's Street London 1919, 1905, pp. 79-128. Project Gutenberg, www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/16966/pg16966-images.html#LECTURE_IV.

Brown, Richard E. "Why Study the History of Neuroscience?." Frontiers in behavioral neuroscience vol. 13 82. 22 May. 2019, doi:10.3389/fnbeh.2019.00082

Bynum, W. F., and Michael Neve. "Hamlet on the Couch: Hamlet Is a Kind of Touchstone by Which to Measure Changing Opinion—Psychiatric and Otherwise—about Madness." American Scientist, vol. 74, no. 4, 1986, pp. 390–96. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27854253. Accessed 2 Feb. 2023.

Davis, Tenney L. "The Sanity of Hamlet." The Journal of Philosophy, vol. 18, no. 23, 1921, pp. 629–34. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/2939352. Accessed 24 May 2023.

Freud, Sigmund. Mourning and Melancholia. Vol. XIV, 1917. Free-ebooks.net, www.free-ebooks.net/psychology-culture/Mourning-and-Melancholia/pdf?dl&preview.

Greg, W. W. "Hamlet's Hallucination." The Modern Language Review, vol. 12, no. 4, 1917, pp. 393–421. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/3714827. Accessed 3 Feb. 2023.

Hill, W. Speed. "A Psychiatrist Examines Hamlet." Shakespeare Quarterly, vol. 28, no. 3, 1977, pp. 369–71. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/2869091. Accessed 24 May 2023.

Hirsh, James. "The 'To Be, or Not to Be' Speech: Evidence, Conventional Wisdom, and the Editing of 'Hamlet.'" Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England, vol. 23, 2010, pp. 34–62. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24322554. Accessed 15 May 2023.

Jansson, Åsa. "Mood disorders and the brain: depression, melancholia, and the historiography of psychiatry." Medical history vol. 55,3 (2011): 393-9. doi:10.1017/s0025727300005469

Kaaber, Lars. Royal Knavery Rediscovering Shakespeare's "Hamlet". Cadwal Books, 2003.

Keener, Joe. "Evolving Hamlet: Brains, Behavior, and the Bard." Interdisciplinary Literary Studies, vol. 14, no. 2, 2012, pp. 150–63. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.5325/intelitestud.14.2.0150. Accessed 3 Feb. 2023.

Kendler, Kenneth S. "The Origin of Our Modern Concept of Depression-The History of Melancholia From 1780-1880: A Review." JAMA psychiatry vol. 77,8 (2020): 863-868. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2019.4709

Lyon, Karen. "The Four Humors: Eating in the Renaissance." Folger Shakespeare *Library*, Folger Shakespeare Library, 4 Dec. 2015, www.folger.edu/blogs/shakespeare-and-beyond/the-four-humors-eating-in-the-renaissance/?_ga=2.72740433.330856201.1681152107-75521103.1681152107.

National Institute of Health. "Depression." *National Institute of Mental Health*, US Department of Health and Human Services, www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression. Accessed 20 May 2023.

O'Sullivan, Mary Isabelle. "Hamlet and Dr. Timothy Bright." PMLA, vol. 41, no. 3, 1926, pp. 667–79. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/457621. Accessed 2 Feb. 2023.

Paykel, Eugene S. "Basic concepts of depression." Dialogues in clinical neuroscience vol. 10,3 (2008): 279-89. doi:10.31887/DCNS.2008.10.3/espaykel

"Quintessence, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, March 2023, www.oed.com/view/Entry/156701. Accessed 22 May 2023.

Reid, Stephen A. "Hamlet's Melancholia." American Imago, vol. 31, no. 4, 1974, pp. 378–400. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/26303078. Accessed 1 Feb. 2023

Salaverry, Oswaldo. "La piedra de la locura: inicios históricos de la salud mental" [The stone of madness: starting points of the history of mental health]. Revista peruana de medicina experimental y salud publica vol. 29,1 (2012): 143-8. doi:10.1590/s1726-46342012000100022

Shakespeare, William. The Tragical History of Hamlet Prince of Denmark. Penguin Random House, 1957.

Shaw, A B, and Neil Pickering. "Depressive illness delayed Hamlet's revenge." Medical humanities vol. 28,2 (2002): 92-6. doi:10.1136/mh.28.2.92

Smith, Barbara. "Neither Accident nor Intent: Contextualizing the Suicide of Ophelia." *South Atlantic Review*, vol. 73, no. 2, 2008, pp. 96–112. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27784781. Accessed 23 May 2023.

Telles-Correia, Diogo, and João Gama Marques. "Melancholia before the twentieth century: fear and sorrow or partial insanity?." Frontiers in psychology vol. 6 81. 3 Feb. 2015, doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00081.