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Gendered Madness in Early Modern Drama

Early Modern tragedies are littered with characters that are deemed mad. Yet, through studying portrayals of mad characters it becomes clear that there are varying types of madness. Furthermore, outside of portrayals of genuine madness and insanity, there appear to be different social standards and expectations for men and women, and thus characters within these plays can be characterised as mad for different reasons due to their gender and rejection of society's expectations of them. Men who express obsessive and depressive behaviour are determined to be mad.[1] However, women are considered mad when they play the role of an oracle or truth teller. Both of these depictions of madness are not true expressions of insanity but reflect the gender expectations of Early Modern society of men to be rational and women to be submissive and respectful. Acting outside of gender norms is what results in these classifications, leading to this discrepancy between what characterises male madness and female insanity. The foundations for these classifications are first established in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, which popularised the revenge tragedy. However, around 20 years later Shakespeare appears to have used Kyd as a model and developed his own, more defined, categories of madness in plays such as *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. These plays shed light on Early Modern expectations of men and women, the gender roles during this time, and on the wide-ranging use of the term madness to classify breaks from traditional behaviour.

[1] Early Modern audiences would have considered this type of behaviour to be reflective of melancholy, such as the melancholy described in Robert Burton's *The Essential Anatomy of Melancholy*.

Early Modern conceptions of gender were polarised, as men were thought to be rational, while women were considered to have a more emotional nature. Jennifer C. Vaught, in her book *Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern English Literature* acknowledges this gendered view of emotions, proposing:

> Gender tends to shape and limit the ways in which both sexes display a variety of emotions in early modern text representative of different literary genres. Men often express their emotions stoically or moderately, or vent intense emotions through violent action. Women frequently grieve by weeping and wailing and traditionally perform the cultural work of mourning. (2-3)

She further suggests that "excessive displays of emotion are often gendered as feminine in medieval and early modern discourse" (1). Similarly, Ian Maclean, in his work *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, records that Early Modern English society believed that the uterus "weakens rationality and increases incidence and violence of passions in women," highlighting this gendered perception of extreme portrayals of emotion (42). Early Modern society associated extreme emotions with women while considering men to be more rational, and consequently men who were intensely passionate in public were marked as effeminate.

This presence of men with sensibility on stage is significant in reflecting Early Modern English values and attitudes. Vaught also acknowledges that "early modern writers also feature those who redefine customary rhetoric about how men and women tend to display a range of emotions" (3). Vaught argues in her book that these portrayals that redefine customary rhetoric are reflective of the changing role of men in courtly society and the increasing emotionality present among men. However, the depictions of these men with increased sensibility in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* perhaps reflect the resistance of Early Modern society against these changing gender roles, as overtly emotional men within these plays are identified as mad. Through this identification Kyd and

Shakespeare may be suggesting that Early Modern English society considered these extreme emotional displays to depart from traditional gender roles, and through identifying these passionate acts as mad Early Modern society was attempting to restrict male behaviour in order to continue and protect their established masculine role.

Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* was the first revenge tragedy, and consequently laid the foundations for this new genre, including the character archetypes of male and female madness that became characteristic of this genre. Kyd used his play as an attempt to return Greek tragedy to the Early Modern stage with adaptations that would make it more appealing to his contemporary audience (Bevington 3). Written in the late 1580s, Kyd's play became incredibly popular, resulting in the revenge tragedy genre being taken up by many English playwrights who incorporated the vital elements of Kyd's play to create their own revenge plays. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, very few characters are explicitly identified as being mad. However, several of the characters within this play express the same behaviours and qualities that Shakespeare's characters exhibit in *Hamlet*, a play considered to have been based on *The Spanish Tragedy*, where they are verbally acknowledged as being mad. Thus, despite the lack of verbally characterised madness, due to the portrayals of madness in Shakespeare's work we can infer which characters and behaviours would have been considered mad by Early Modern audiences when viewing Kyd's play.

The most significant male character in Kyd's play is Hieronimo, and while Hieronimo is only momentarily determined to be mad by another character towards the end of the play, his display of extreme grief and sorrow establishes a trope for male madness reflected in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and other Early Modern plays. Expressions of intense grief, especially in the case of a loss of a family member, is one of the most significant departures from male gender roles that result in men being identified as mad in Early Modern drama. While men were allowed to grieve during the Early Modern period, society expected public displays of

this grief to be controlled and minimal, as Vaught records that "Men often express their emotions stoically or moderately" (2). Thus, symptoms of depression or obsessive grieving in men depicted a drastic shift from their traditional gender roles, and consequently it appears that this became a prominent cause for being categorised as mad. Kyd's play is rife with male characters that express depression or extreme grief at some point during the course of the play. However, out of these characters Hieronimo is the only one identified as mad by other characters. Hieronimo is also the only male character that exhibits behaviours corresponding to depression over the course of several scenes in the play, highlighting the obsessive nature of his melancholy which is a vital element of the trope of male madness.

Kyd contrasts Hieronimo's display of obsessive grief with the grief experienced by the Viceroy of Portugal. While the Viceroy of Portugal behaves in a way that is reflective of depression when he believes that his son Balthazar has been killed, his melancholy is soon extinguished within the play. Upon learning of his son's alleged death, the Viceroy becomes despondent, falling to the ground and abandoning his crown. Yet this outward expression of his extreme grief only occurs over the course of Act 1, scene 3 and lasts for 95 lines before his character becomes absent for the next eight scenes. In Act 3, scene 1, he reappears and, after another 61 lines, learns that his son is alive and ceases to portray extreme emotion, returning to rationality. While this deep melancholy has presumably continued for a significant length of time, it has been present for a relatively short period in the play, being portrayed on stage for only around 150 lines. Thus, Kyd portrays this display of grief as relatively insignificant in comparison to Hieronimo's own obsessive melancholy. This may explain why the Viceroy of Portugal is never identified by other characters as being mad. Furthermore, due to the Viceroy's limited time on stage the audience does not see many of the consequences of his deep melancholy, as they do with Hieronimo, and these consequences may also play an important role in the categorisation of madness. Kyd's

limited identification of madness within his play may a result of him acknowledging the break of gender expectations through Hieronimo in terms of his blatant expression of sincere emotion, while also recognising the allowance of a grieving period for men despite their gender roles excluding emotionality, through his depiction of the Viceroy.

Hieronimo first begins to display intense melancholy after discovering his murdered son's body in his garden, but this portrayal of obsessive grief continues through to the end of the play as Hieronimo never truly recovers. This lack of recovery from his grief in a timely fashion, and his obsessive grief, may be what necessitates his identification as mad due to his rejection of the short grieving period allowed to men during this time. Hieronimo begins to break the traditional expectations of his gender as soon as he discovers his son's body, which Kyd emphasises through a hyperbolic metaphor: "For me amidst this dark and deathful shades / To drown thee with an ocean of my tears" (2.5.22-23). This allusion to a sea of tears acts as a means of accentuating Hieronimo's outward expression of extreme grief through crying, while also acknowledging this expression as a betrayal of society's traditional gender roles for men.[2] Vaught recognises the effeminate nature of male tears, as she claims that when men cry, this tends "to ally them with women" (10). By this, Vaught is referring to the emasculation that occurs through this outward display of grief, making men appear more feminine than masculine. Hieronimo repeats this hyperbolic metaphor to describe his effeminate display of emotions to introduce his next appearance on stage in Act 3, scene 2: "O eyes, no eyes, but fountains fraught with tears!" (1). While this melodramatic description of his continuing grief at the loss of his son also reflects the more exaggerated elements of Greek tragedy and the increased emotionality present in both male and female characters in Greek tragedy, it continues to work as a means of emphasising Hieronimo's departure from

[2] This alignment of male tears with feminine identity is also present in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. As Vaught recognizes, "Laertes refers to weeping as part of the feminine dimension of his masculine identity" (127). Laertes claims that once he ceases to cry over Ophelia's death, "the woman will be out," referring to this femininity that he is displaying in his expression of extreme grief (4.7.187).

traditional male behaviour and expectations during the Early Modern period. Thus, Kyd uses this hyperbolic metaphorical language to highlight Hieronimo's effeminate display of emotions, which foreshadows his future categorisation as mad by characters within the play.

Furthermore, Hieronimo's obsession with his grief is evident in his unfailing desire for revenge and the extent he goes to in order to exact this revenge. Revenge was embedded within male expectations of the Early Modern period, and Vaught acknowledges this within her book, proposing, "aggression, violence, and revenge are usually associated with men" (83). Vaught also records that in Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*, in which the titular character's close friend is murdered, "Edward's inability to channel his grief for Gaveston into violent acts of revenge is a further sign of his effeminacy," further highlighting the place of revenge in Early Modern expectations of male behaviour (80). Hieronimo's revenge acts to sustain and enhance his grief by playing a role in his obsession with his son's death. Thus, though revenge itself is not a departure from the gender expectations of the time, the way it functions within Kyd's play sustains his obsessive grief which is a departure from male behavioural norms of the time. This natural male inclination toward revenge is highlighted through Hieronimo's immediate reference to it when his wife Isabella joins him and discovers Horatio's body: "To know the author were some ease of grief, / For in revenge my heart would find relief" (2.5.40-41). However, the obsessive nature of revenge is also accentuated by Hieronimo's claim that it is the purpose of his life when he discovers Bel-imperia's letter:

> Dear was the life of my beloved son,
>
> And of his death behooves me be revenged;
>
> Then hazard not thine own, Hieronimo,
>
> But live t'effect thy resolution. (3.2.44-47)

According to Hieronimo his sole purpose for continuing to live is to avenge his son. Through the character of Hieronimo, Kyd highlights both the natural inclination of men to desire revenge and the obsessive nature of this vengeance. It is possible that Kyd may be trying to suggest that the true source of Hieronimo's categorisation as mad is the play's denial of an opportunity for Hieronimo to exact retribution, as Hieronimo becomes obsessed with revenge due to his inability to attain it. Robert Burton, in his work *The Essential Anatomy of Melancholy*, recognises the obsessive nature of revenge and the way revenge can perpetrate extreme grief, as he claims that "Charles the Sixth, that lunatic French king, fell into this misery, out of the extremity of his passion, desire of revenge and malice" (38). According to Burton it was Charles' extreme passion and his search for vengeance that drove him to melancholy, highlighting the potential for revenge to encourage and produce intense grief. Thus, Kyd may be proposing that this category of male madness is due to a contradiction in Early Modern English expectations of men, as revenge is incorporated into their gender role, but obsessive grief is not, even though an inability to attain vengeance is what appears to cause this continued depression in Hieronimo's character.

However, Hieronimo's speech in Act 3, scene 2 also suggests that Kyd is acknowledging that this lack of opportunity to take his revenge is not the only reason that Hieronimo is identified as mad, as Hieronimo also expresses obsessive grief that is not tied to his inability to avenge his son's murder. Hieronimo's suggestion that there is no other reason for him to continue living besides taking revenge highlights the extreme level of Hieronimo's grief. Moreover, Hieronimo states earlier in the scene that his life is "no life, but lively form of death!" (3.2.2), further accentuating his melodramatic response to the loss of his son. This portrayal of grief works to ultimately emasculate Hieronimo, emphasising to the audience his departure from the traditional expectations of male behaviour and thus foreshadowing his identification as mad as a consequence of this departure.

Kyd also reinforces this notion of madness founded on gender norms and expectations through Hieronimo's portrayal of feigned madness in Act 3, scene 11. It is the distinct difference between Hieronimo's feigned madness, which is diagnosed as lunacy, and his obsessive grief that reinforces the multiple definitions of madness that were in use during the Early Modern period. In order to appear mad Hieronimo pretends not to understand what two Portuguese men are saying to him, and misinterprets their words. The Portuguese, who are both presumably men given their role as messengers in the play, consequently deem him a "lunatic" (3.11.33). Through this depiction of madness, however, Kyd is able to demonstrate the difference between this type of madness, which is presumably a reflection of genuine insanity due to the Portuguese's recognition of it, and the madness that Hieronimo is pronounced to possess, where the audience understands Hieronimo to be quite rational. In this small scene, Kyd uses feigned insanity to further emphasise the use of madness to identify individuals breaking gender expectations during the Early Modern period, and consequently to highlight Hieronimo's categorisation in this latter form of madness.

Furthermore, Kyd places this scene immediately prior to Hieronimo's categorisation as mad due to his genuine behaviour, further marking the difference between these two portrayals of madness. In this following scene, Lorenzo proclaims that Hieronimo is mad. Lorenzo is serving his own interests in identifying Hieronimo as mad, as he is aware that Hieronimo knows he killed Horatio and he is trying to make other characters within the play disregard Hieronimo's testimony. However, within *The Spanish Tragedy* only male characters classify Hieronimo's madness. Thus, Kyd may be suggesting that the categorisation of madness is also gendered and that only men can identify madness. Kyd may be attempting to reflect the effects of his Early Modern patriarchal society, as it is men that create and define gender roles and consequently it would also be men that would determine

when individuals were breaking these expectations. Thus, it would be men that would characterise types of madness and identify instances of these types of madness.

It is Hieronimo's use of indirect references in order to speak the truth that result in his categorisation as mad. Hieronimo's accuses Lorenzo of murdering his son through riddles that leave the other characters unaware of his meaning:

> Away, Lorenzo, hinder me no more,
>
> For though hast made me bankrupt of my bliss.
>
> Give me my son! You shall not ransom him.
>
> Away! I'll rip the bowels of the earth
>
> And ferry over to th'Elysian plains,
>
> And bring my son to show his deadly wounds. (3.12.68-73)

Through referencing places in the afterlife and addressing Lorenzo directly Hieronimo accuses Lorenzo of murdering his son. Yet due to their ignorance of Horatio's death, Hieronimo's actions bewilder the other characters on stage and thus they accept Lorenzo's pronouncement that he is acting like a "lunatic" (3.12.89). Due to the audience's knowledge that Lorenzo murdered Horatio, however, Hieronimo does not appear mad to them. Thus, Kyd uses the audience's knowledge of Horatio's murder to reinforce that Hieronimo's categorisation as mad is the result of his impassioned display of grief that breaks away from traditional expectations of masculine behaviour and masculine rationality.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), there were three separate definitions of madness that were in use during the Early Modern period. While madness could be used to refer to true insanity and mental illness, it could also refer to "wild excitement or enthusiasm; ecstasy; exuberance or lack of restraint" (Madness, OED). Yet the first instance that the OED cites for this use of madness occurs in George Peele's *Old Wives Tale* (1595), in which one page says to another, "Doth this sadnes become thy madnes?" This

use of madness in reference to a young man's display of extreme emotion reflects the trope of male madness in Early Modern revenge tragedies that was established by Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. Furthermore, the OED defines ecstasy as "the state of being 'beside oneself', thrown into a frenzy or a stupor, with anxiety, astonishment, fear, or passion" and as "an exalted state of feeling which engrosses the mind to the exclusion of thought; rapture, transport. Now chiefly, intense or rapturous delight: the expressions ecstasy of woe, ecstasy of sorrow, ecstasy of despair" (Ecstasy, OED). Thus, while these words have different dominant connotations to modern society, during the Early Modern Period extreme sorrow and melancholy would have been considered ecstasy and thus would fit into this definition of madness as ecstasy. Consequently, this definition of madness that was in use during the Early Modern period, as recorded by the OED, highlights how the trope of men in revenge tragedies expressing obsessive melancholy resulted in their identification as mad by their society, accentuating this categorisation as stemming from a rejection of traditional Early Modern gender roles and expectations.

Through Kyd's characterisation of Hieronimo and his gendered portrayal of male madness resulting from effeminate displays of obsessive grief, Kyd developed an archetype of male madness for revenge tragedies that was consequently adopted and adapted by Shakespeare in his characterisation of Hamlet. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the most direct adaptation of Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. Written between 1599 and 1602, over a decade after Kyd's revenge tragedy, *Hamlet* possesses many of the archetypes that Kyd began to develop in his play. Throughout this play, Shakespeare begins to more fully develop these character tropes and plot devices and explore his own understandings of madness. Shakespeare is more overt in his classification of male madness as a break in traditional gender norms and behaviour expectations within *Hamlet*, as he has Claudius explicitly identify Hamlet's extreme grief as effeminate:

> To persever
>
> In obstinate condolement in a course
>
> Of impious stubbornness, ‘tis unmanly grief,
>
> It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,
>
> A heart unfortified, or mind impatient. (1.2.92-96)

This catalogue of what Hamlet’s grief reveals about his heart, will, and mind highlights the negative view that Early Modern English society had of displays of intense male grief, and thus accentuates this as a drastic shift away from traditional male behaviour of the time. Furthermore, using Claudius as the vessel through which to reveal societies views on this, Shakespeare further reinforces the notion that gender roles and behavioural expectations were created by men during this time thanks to the patriarchal society, thus reflecting Kyd’s similar proposition.

Claudius’ identification of Hamlet’s effeminate expressions of grief foreshadow Hamlet’s later identification as mad and the elements of his character that result in this categorisation. Hamlet acknowledges his own intense melancholy and his outward expressions of this, using syndeton to highlight the sincerity of his feelings:

> ‘Seems’, madam – nay it is, I know not ‘seems’.
>
> ‘Tis not alone my inky cloak, cold mother,
>
> Nor customary suits of solemn black,
>
> Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
>
> No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
>
> Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,
>
> Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
>
> That can denote me truly. These indeed ‘seem’,
>
> For they are actions that a man might play,

But I have that within which passes show,

These but the trappings and the suits of woe. (1.2.76-86)

Not only does Hamlet acknowledge the extreme nature of his outward display of grief through his clothing, sighing and crying, and his general downcast behaviour, but he also emphasises through this syndeton that his grief far surpasses these external appearances. Furthermore, through the placement of this scene prior to Hamlet's discovery that officers have seen his father's ghost, Shakespeare further emphasises Hamlet's intense and consuming grief, as it is only after this initial display of continued mourning that Hamlet encounters his father's ghost, a reason for him to continue grieving. Thus, through rhetorical devices and scene placement Shakespeare highlights Hamlet's obsessive grief and effeminate displays of his grief, foreshadowing Hamlet's pending identification as mad.

Additionally, Shakespeare further emphasises the extensively long period of grieving that Hamlet has honoured by not only explicitly stating its length but comparing it to Hamlet's mother's grieving period, which as a woman should extend much longer than Hamlet's own (Vaught, 2-3). Later in this same scene (Act 1, scene 2), Hamlet has a soliloquy in which he reflects on how long it has been since his father's death and his disapproval at his mother's period of grieving:

But two months dead – nay not so much, not two – […]

And yet within a month

(Let me not think on't – Frailty, thy name is Woman),

A little month, or e'er those shoes were old

With which she followed my poor father's body,

Like Niobe, all tears. Why she –

O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason

Would have mourned longer – married with my uncle. (1.2.138, 145-151)

Through the repetition of time Hamlet works to emphasis his mother's inappropriately short period of grieving. His comparisons of his mother to Niobe, a figure in Greek mythology who mourned the loss of her children until she was turned into a weeping stone statue, and a beast further emphasise his disapproval of her expression of grief. However, according the gender norms of Early Modern England, women displayed more intense emotions compared to men, and consequently Hamlet's mother would be expected to grieve for a significantly longer period of time than Hamlet. While Horatio, and later Gertrude herself, acknowledge that the King's death and the Queen's remarriage occurred in quick succession, Shakespeare uses Hamlet's comparison to highlight that Hamlet's emphatic and hyperbolic discussion are not proportional to the level of haste in which these events occurred. Thus, through this comparison Shakespeare is further emphasising Hamlet's own extensive period of grieving and consequently his emasculating display of emotions, again foreshadowing Hamlet's impending classification as mad.

Moreover, it is through Hamlet's categorisation as mad that Shakespeare also reinforces Kyd's suggestion that the patriarchal society of Early Modern England requires men to identify and characterise madness. The first mention of Hamlet as mad occurs in Act 2, scene 1 in a conversation between Ophelia and Polonius in which Ophelia is describing Hamlet's increasingly concerning behaviour towards her to her father. However, it is Polonius that must be the one to identify Hamlet as mad, while Ophelia's role is only to recount her interactions with him (71-117). Furthermore, it is Polonius again who categorises Hamlet as mad and pronounces this to the Queen and Claudius in the following scene: "your noble son is mad. / Mad call I it, for to determine true madness, / What is't but to be nothing else but mad?" (2.2.91-93). Thus, through having men identify Hamlet as mad, Shakespeare supports the trope Kyd established that men must be the ones to identify madness. Again, this reflects the patriarchal society of Early Modern England as men defined and established the

gender norms of this time, and thus men also defined what it meant to break these traditions of behaviour and identified when this happened.

While it is not Hamlet's effeminate expressions of grief that cause Polonius to categorise him as mad and pronounce this to the court, ultimately it is through Hamlet's intense and obsessive grief that Gertrude and Claudius are convinced of his madness. Polonius first comes to identify Hamlet as mad when Hamlet comes to Ophelia's private chamber improperly dressed, and after some strange behaviour, leaves without a word (2.1.74-97). From this Polonius assumes that Hamlet is "mad for thy love," a very different form of madness to the one Hamlet actually expresses throughout the play (2.1.82). However, it is true to Polonius' character that he should believe Hamlet to be mad for the wrong reasons, as throughout the play Polonius fills the role of the clown, bumbling through society and constantly contradicting himself while believing himself to be rational. Furthermore, despite this inaccurate cause for Polonius' belief that Hamlet is mad and Claudius and Gertrude's initial support for this theory, ultimately they come to believe that Hamlet is mad due to Hamlet's obsessive grief. This realization is again made by a man, as through a ploy that Polonius devises to prove his own theory, Claudius comes to realise:

> Love! His affections do not that way tend.
> Nor what he spake, though it lacked form a little,
> Was not like madness. There's something in his soul
> O'er which his melancholy sits on brood (3.1.161-164)

Although Claudius suggests that Hamlet's display was not reflective of madness, it is likely that here Claudius is using another definition of madness more in alignment with the definition modern audiences ascribe to the term. This is further supported by Claudius' following comment that "madness in great ones must not unwatched go," in which he is referring to Hamlet (3.2.187). Thus, through Hamlet's identification as mad by Polonius and

his subsequent categorisation by Claudius, Shakespeare highlights the multiple definitions of madness and the varying use of this term, while simultaneously emphasising the use of madness to characterise Hamlet's departure from traditional Early Modern gender roles through his effeminate display of grief.

Unlike Hieronimo in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hamlet has several opportunities throughout the play to take his revenge. Yet it is his response to these opportunities that further emphasises his departure from traditional gender roles and marks another instance of Shakespeare's adaptation of the archetype created for him by Kyd. While Hieronimo does not have many opportunities to exact his revenge, his desire to obtain revenge never wavers. Like Hamlet, Hieronimo desires proof before he acts out his revenge, but is determined to ultimately take it. In comparison, Hamlet highlights his own conflict about taking his revenge by likening his actions to those of a woman:

> Why, what an ass am I: This is most brave,
> That I, the son of a dear murdered,
> Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
> Must like a whore unpack my heart with words
> And fall a-cursing like a very drab (2.2.517-521)

Through this comparison to the actions of women and the use of traditional gender roles during this time, as women were associated with words and men with deeds, Hamlet further emphasises his own effeminate actions and departure from society's expectations of male behaviour (Parker 23). Vaught's assertion that men "vent intense emotions through violent action." also highlights this gender disparity as Early Modern English society expects violent action from Hamlet (2). Part of Hamlet's departure from traditional gender roles is his own conflict surrounding his quest to avenge his father, as Hamlet's simile comparing him to a female prostitute falling in profanities emphasises his partial desire to avoid the violent

actions required for his revenge (2.2.520-521). Unlike Hieronimo, Hamlet is torn in his desire for revenge, and consequently becomes further emasculated and more significantly departs from the Early Modern expectations of male behaviour. Through Hamlet's conflict, Shakespeare suggests that Hamlet's categorisation as mad stems from his feminine actions and his partial desire to avoid violence, which cause him to avoid taking revenge when opportunities arise. Thus, Shakespeare identifies that it is not his lack of opportunities to exact revenge that result in his classification as mad. Shakespeare uses Hamlet as a means of exploring the multiple Early Modern definitions of madness and the consequent categorisation of men as mad. Through this Shakespeare further develops and establishes this character trope of male madness within the revenge tragedy genre that Thomas Kyd pioneered.

Understanding the gender dynamics of Early Modern society, and the expectations this society had for each gender, not only reveals how male madness was characterised during this period but also discloses the characterisation of female madness. Similarly, the Oxford English Dictionary's multiple definitions of madness also provide insight into the portrayal and characterisation of female madness within Early Modern plays. The OED records that madness during the Early Modern period could also be used to refer to "imprudence, delusion, or (wild) foolishness resembling insanity" (Madness, OED). This definition of madness could be used to reference actions of women during this period that depart from traditional gender norms, such as critiquing the patriarchy and predicting the future, as these actions would also likely be considered dangerous and foolish. Furthermore, as Carol Thomas Neely records in her book *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture*, "Female sex role stereotypes are closer to diagnosed madness than are male stereotypes, and women are more likely to be punished for deviant behaviour than are men; hence they may be labelled mad if they behave in excessively

feminine or in excessively masculine ways" (214). Thus, Neely acknowledges the Early Modern discrimination against women as they could be identified as mad due to behaviour outside of society's expectations of them. Thus, this additional definition of madness in use during the Early Modern period emphasises how the trope of women in revenge tragedies as defying traditional gender expectations could result in their classification as mad.

This potential use of madness to identify women who break away from their traditional gender roles is recorded both in records from the 17th century and more modern reflections on Early Modern texts. An anonymous account, published in 1641 and recorded in Angeline Goreau's *The Whole Duty of a Woman: Female Writers in Seventeenth Century England*, discusses women in education and women who occupy preaching positions in Early Modern England, claiming, "I have declared some of the female academies […] but where their university is I cannot tell, but I suppose that Bedlam or Bridewell would be two convenient places for them" (110). This anonymous writer equates women in knowledgeable positions to mad women through referencing these two insane asylums, thus reinforcing the Early Modern use of madness to identify women stepping beyond society's expected behaviour of their sex. Furthermore, through possessing knowledge, these academic women the anonymous source refers to are in a position to influence others and speak out against their oppressive society. This theme of knowledgeable women critiquing their society is present in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and becomes embedded in the revenge tragedy trope of female madness.

Eleanor Davies, a self-proclaimed prophet in the early 17th century who opposed her patriarchal society through her writing, provides a real life example of the Early Modern use of madness to identify women acting outside of society's expectations of them. Megan Matchinske, in her book *Writing, Gender and State in Early Modern England: Identity Formation and the Female Subject*, explores the works of Eleanor Davies and records that

early in Davies' career, "she is mocked as a madwoman, warned of the consequences of usurping a role that is not within woman's domain," highlighting the danger of breaking away from Early Modern gender roles for women during this time (147). Furthermore, Matchinske references Esther Cope's ambivalence regarding whether Davies' madness was true, or "whether she was meerly emotionally disturbed, and/or engaged in forms of opposition that [were] regarded as unacceptable" (148). Cope, within her book *Handmaid of the Holy Spirit: Dame Eleanor Davies, Never Soe Mad a Ladie*, further highlights the possibility that Davies' identification as mad was the consequence of her deviant behaviour as she proposes, "Families, friends, and officials determined whether individuals were mad and how they should be treated, and persons who deviated from norms of conduct, particularly those who seemed to defy authority or become fanatics in religion, could be deemed mad" (88). Thus, women who moved beyond the behaviour deemed acceptable for their sex were at risk of being identified as mad as a result of defying the confining expectations of their patriarchal society. Matchinske additionally accentuates the significance of Early Modern definitions of madness in understanding the classification of Davies as mad:

> Obviously, the question of madness itself, at least according to its current definitions, is an anachronistic one for Davies, if only because it fails to register the historical contexts out of which those initial charges came. Michael MacDonald reminds us that acceptable definitions of madness in the seventeenth century were more overtly political and religious than they are now, less directly linked to notions of sickness and debility. (148)

Here Matchinske acknowledges the disparity between modern understandings of madness and uses of this term in Early Modern England. Through this disparity Matchinske acknowledges the potential that Davies' society may have classified her as mad due to her prophetic pamphlet writing and her criticism of the patriarchy within these pamphlets.

Eleanor Davies provides a real life example of the classification of women as mad due to their rejection of traditional gender roles, an example that is reflected in the revenge tragedy trope of female madness taken up by Kyd and Shakespeare.

Thomas Kyd has two significant female characters within his play *The Spanish Tragedy*, Isabella and Bel-imperia, and while neither of these women are ever referred to as mad by other characters within the play, Bel-imperia establishes a character archetype for female madness that is adopted by Shakespeare and other Early Modern playwrights. Isabella, upon discovering the murder of her son Horatio, descends into a deep melancholy which culminates with her suicide in the fourth act of the play. However, Isabella's grief is a relatively common portrayal of women after losing a child.[3] Thus, it is unlikely that Early Modern audiences would have considered Isabella to be mad.

Bel-imperia, on the other hand, while also not overtly identified as being mad, breaks away from the gender norms and expectations of women during the Early Modern period. Unlike most female characters on the English stage at this time, Bel-imperia is sexually experienced, self-assured, and feisty. Some of these characteristics, though not all, are adopted by Shakespeare in his characterisation of Ophelia, who is overtly considered mad within *Hamlet*. Thus, while Kyd does not characterise Bel-imperia as mad, it is likely that her actions would have led Early Modern audiences to consider her mad or otherwise dishonourable and disgraceful, and it is her rejections of traditional gender roles that come to create the archetype of female madness adopted by Kyd's successors.

However, Bel-imperia distinguishes herself from later portrayals of female madness in that her family and the people that surround her acknowledge and treat her as being rational, as Kyd does not directly portray her as mad within his play. Yet this may be due to Kyd's use of the play as an attempt to bring Ancient Greek tragedy back to the English stage.

[3] While it is not necessarily common for female characters who have lost a child to commit suicide, there are plentiful examples of women in Early Modern plays who die of grief after the loss of a child, such as Lady Montague in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Women in Greek tragedies are often autonomous, decisive and sexually empowered, such as Antigone and Jocasta in Seneca's *Phoenissae*. These women in Greek tragedy were also not considered mad as female gender roles in Ancient Greece were less restrictive. Furthermore, most Greek tragedies were based on myth and consequently contained female Gods and other empowered female characters of legend. Thus, the way other characters within *The Spanish Tragedy* treat Bel-imperia may be too reflective of Ancient Greek society, which may also explain why certain aspects of Bel-imperia's character are abandoned by Kyd's successors when they adopt his model for the revenge tragedy, and why the later portrayals of lead women in these plays are often considered mad by their surrounding characters.

Furthermore, other elements of Kyd's plays are also abandoned by his successors in the creation of the revenge tragedy, including having lines and sections of the dialogue delivered in Latin, and having a Greek Chorus on stage, which is the function of the characters of Revenge and Andrea in Kyd's play. These discarded elements of Kyd's play further support that they may have been too closely tied to Ancient Greek traditions to be properly understood and appreciated by Early Modern audiences.[4] This change between Ancient Greek and Early Modern culture and gender expectations may have resulted in Early Modern audiences of Kyd's play being conflicted about Bel-Imperia's character as the way that other characters within the play treat her is not reflective of the likely reactions Early Modern audiences would have had to her portrayal.

Bel-imperia may have been considered shameful rather than mad by Early Modern audiences due to her sexual empowerment. While sexually enabled women were accepted and relatively common within Ancient Greek society, in Early Modern England they were highly disapproved of. Thus, Bel-imperia's sexual license may have influenced the audience's conception of her as dishonourable rather than mad, as while it was considered a

[4] Kyd may also have been writing for an upper class audience rather than the general masses, as education during this time included heavy focus on the Greek tragic tradition, and consequently the court would have appreciated these elements in ways that the common people would not have (Bevington, 3).

vice, sexual activity in women during the Early Modern period was not connected to madness but rather more commonly associated with witchcraft.[5] The ideal woman of the Early Modern period, as recorded in *The whole duty of a woman, or, An infallible guide to the fair sex*, was pious, modest, meek, compassionate, affable, chaste, and humble. In this text, the anonymous author provides direction for women on how to become the ideal lady and embody all of these characteristics. Later constructions of female madness in Early Modern plays incorporated these characteristics of the ideal lady, and thus these female characters are more easily seen as victims rather than enabled women. However, these later portrayals of female madness and the archetype that develops continue to be defined by defying gender norms through playing the role of truth teller, which is another fundamental aspect of Bel-imperia's character within Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. Thus, while Bel-imperia may not have been viewed as mad by Early Modern English audiences, she is an important character in the development of the Early Modern archetype of female madness.

Bel-imperia lays the foundations for this archetype of female characters within revenge tragedies by acting as both a truth teller and an oracle over the course of Kyd's play. In Act 2, scene 4, Bel-imperia provides a weak prediction of the horror that will strike Horatio when they meet outside Horatio's house to profess their love: "I know not what, myself; / And yet my heart foretells me some mischance" (14-15). While her prediction is more of a feeling than a true seeing of the future, this provides a base for later female characters in the genre such as Shakespeare's Cassandra in *Troilus and Cressida*, who does tell the future. This role of women as oracle within Early Modern revenge tragedies was likely considered foolishness as women make proclamations that, to men, appear to be unfounded, thus reinforcing the role of prophet as a form of madness according to this last OED definition. Furthermore, Bel-imperia also plays the role of truth teller in this play, a role

[5] Stephanie Irene Spoto, in her article "Jacobean Witchcraft and Feminine Power," discusses the association of sexual license and seduction with witchcraft in Early Modern England.

that becomes characteristic of mad women in revenge tragedies. It is through revealing the truth that these women subvert the power of the patriarchy, which would likely be considered a lapse in judgement by men during the Early Modern period due to the lack of power that women held at this time and the ability of the patriarchy to punish such behaviour, again classifying this as a form of madness. It is Bel-imperia who first reveals in a letter to Hieronimo that it was Lorenzo and Balthazar that killed Horatio:

> For want of ink, receive this bloody writ.
> Me hath my hapless brother hid from thee;
> Revenge thyself on Balthazar and him,
> For these were they that murderèd thy son.
> Hieronimo, revenge Horatio's death,
> And better fare than Bel-imperia doth. (3.2.26-31)

She informs Hieronimo of the men who murdered his son, and takes great effort to do so, writing a letter in her blood and dropping it out of a tower window. Then again in Act 3, scene 10 Bel-imperia references this truth, accusing her brother that "thou art no brother, but an enemy!" as he is the one that has robbed her of her chosen lover (25). Thus, Bel-imperia forms a foundation for the archetype of female madness in Early Modern England, as she acts as both a truth teller and oracle.

While Kyd does not overtly characterise any of his female characters as mad, he does explore the idea of madness and how it is categorised and identified. Bel-imperia accuses her brother of having "madding fury […] possess thy wits" (3.10.34). However, as this identification of madness is made by a woman, no characters in the play take note and it does not resurface later in the play. Here Kyd may be again emphasising the role of gender in madness and categorisation of madness, as not only are women and men considered mad for different reasons, but they can also only be identified as mad by men in society, as shown

through Hieronimo's classification as mad. This provides an interesting reflection on gender roles in Early Modern England, as it is also men who determine what the gender norms are and how they expect women and men to act as men hold the higher social status in this society. Furthermore, it is when women are playing the role of truth teller, showing that they know more than or the same as men, or when women are criticising men, that they are categorised as mad. Thus, the categorisation of madness in Early Modern drama can be used to protect the dominant position of men in society by discrediting women when they appear to be equal or better than men. Though this idea is brought up by Kyd in a play where he does not explore madness extensively in his characters, this relationship between men and women and the power of men to determine madness is explored and further expressed in the work of his contemporaries as the archetypes of the revenge tragedy genre are further developed.

Shakespeare explores this potential use of madness to identify female rejections of gender norms and expectations in his own plays, but most evidently within *Hamlet*. Ophelia is the character equivalent of Kyd's Bel-imperia, as she is the younger female protagonist of the play, and consequently many of the foundations established in the character of Bel-imperia are also present in Ophelia, though more fully developed into the archetype of female madness. Over the course of the first three acts of the play Ophelia is established as a virtuous and obedient daughter. However, when Ophelia returns to the stage in Act 4 after the murder of her father Polonius, she is introduced by the queen and a gentleman as being mad: "She speaks much of her father, says she hears / There's tricks i'th' world, and hems and beats her heart, / Spurns enviously at straws, speaks things in doubt / That carry but half sense" (4.5.4-7). Significantly, this first categorisation of Ophelia as mad is delivered by a man, reflecting the similar identification of Hamlet as mad which also had to be made by a man. Furthermore, the King supports this claim later in the scene, claiming, "poor Ophelia / Divided from herself and her fair judgement," reinforcing her classification as insane, and

further suggesting that this classification must be made by a man (84-85). Thus, Shakespeare portrays Ophelia as possessing all of the character virtues required to establish her as a potential victim of extreme emotion as she respects and obeys the male figures in her life: her father and brother. Upon the murder of her father it is intuitive for the audience to believe her to be incredibly grief stricken, and thus it is not difficult for them to perceive her as mad when the gentleman introduces her as so overcome with grief that she has lost her sense.

However, when coming on stage, Ophelia does not act as though she is overcome with grief or is mad, but rather has adopted the position of truth teller, suggesting that it may be this rather than her extreme grief that has caused her fellow characters of the play to identify her as insane. The first few lines that Ophelia sings are credited to a popular ballad, and Ophelia uses them to reference the dead King of Denmark, Hamlet's father, made clear by the claims that he is dead and buried:

> How should I your true love know
> From another one?
> By his cockle hat and staff
> And his sandal shoon. […]
> He is dead and gone, lady,
> He is dead and gone.
> At his head a grass-green turf,
> At his heels a stone. (4.5.23-26, 29-32)

However, closer analysis of the lines reveals that Ophelia may be using them to comment on the Queen's unjust actions towards the king, as the "cockle hat and staff and his sandal shoon" are all signs attributed to the pilgrim which was often seen as a metaphor for the lover during the Early Modern period (Thompson and Taylor 405). Thus, her previous reference to the Queen's "true love" may not have been intended to reference who the Queen truly loved,

but rather the man who truly loved the Queen. Her continued iteration that the King is dead in the next section of the song reinforces the idea that her first reference to him may have been suggesting he truly loved the Queen as the song is focusing on him and his character rather than that of the Queen's. If this is the case Ophelia is here taking on the role of the truth teller as she attempts to inform the queen that the current king does not truly love her and that her previous lover was more virtuous, further emphasised by the allusion of him as the pilgrim. Thus, Shakespeare is adopting the character trope created by Kyd to portray female madness as the result of a breaking away from traditional gender roles, as Ophelia comes to play the role of the truth teller just as Bel-imperia did, acting outside of society's expectation of her.

For contemporary audiences of Shakespeare's play, it is through a lack of understanding of these gender roles and the reasons for classification of individuals as mad in Early Modern England that we come to have interpretations of Ophelia such as this one:

> [A portrayal of Ophelia's speech as though she is genuinely insane]
>
> There's rosemary: that's for remembrance. Pray you, love, remember. And there is pansies: that's for thoughts. […] There's fennel for you, and columbines. There's rue for you, and here's some for me. We may call it herb of grace o'Sundays. You may wear your rue with a difference. There's a daisy. I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died. They say 'a made a good end. (4.5.169-178)

This speech is perhaps the most well-known of Ophelia's throughout the entire play, and to modern audiences this is likely the portrayal of Ophelia that we are most familiar with: one of a woman who is genuinely insane. However, equipped with a more extensive understanding of gender roles during this period and consequently the possible reasons women in these revenge tragedies are being categorised as mad, it is possible to interpret this speech of Ophelia's differently.

While there are no directions in any of the three versions of this play (First Quarto, Second Quarto and First Folio) for who the recipients of these gifts are, except Laertes, scholars have made educated guesses based on traditional flower symbolism at the time, which reveal a potential rationality to Ophelia's seemingly nonsensical speech (Thompson and Taylor 417). It is important to remember that the only characters present on stage for this speech besides Ophelia are Claudius, the Queen, and Laertes. Ophelia offers rosemary for remembrance and pansies for thought to Laertes, a symbol of condolence for the loss of their father (Gerard 135, Thompson and Taylor 417-418). Fennel was associated with flattery and so could be given to anyone present, though columbines signified infidelity and thus would most logically be given to the Queen (Thompson and Taylor 418). Rue was thought to be the herb of grace, and thus represented repentance (Gerard 174, Thompson and Taylor 417). Consequently, it would seem appropriate for Ophelia to be giving these to Claudius and the Queen. While Hamlet does not confide in Ophelia that his uncle killed his father, the play that Hamlet organises for the court in Act 3, scene 2 is not subtle in its allusions to the murder of the King and the queen's subsequent remarrying. Consequently, in this scene Ophelia is playing the role of the truth teller, revealing through the symbolism of these herbs that she understood Hamlet's message and has come to realise that Hamlet's uncle was responsible for the King's death. Furthermore, daisies signified unrequited love and thus would seem appropriate for Ophelia herself, but potentially for Claudius also as through his quick marriage to his brother's wife the audience can assume that he has been infatuated with the Queen for some time (Thompson and Taylor 417). This flower symbolism reveals Ophelia's actions to be something other than an expression of madness.

Finally, violets signified fidelity, and thus Ophelia's comment that they all withered when her father died may be an underhand comment at the lack of fidelity in the court (Gerard 2, Thompson and Taylor 418). Her father's death was an indirect result of the murder

of Hamlet's father, and thus is intimately connected to Hamlet's uncle and his mother, both of whom have shown a lack of loyalty to the King. Claudius' murder of his brother shows a distinct betrayal both to his brother and the country of Denmark. Similarly, Gertrude's remarriage to Claudius soon after the death of her husband is another act of betrayal and accentuates the lack of loyalty to the late King that is present in the court. Thus, this simple comment of Ophelia's about the violets in the Kingdom works to subvert the good appearance of Claudius and the Queen by emphasising the corruption and betrayal within the court of Denmark. Equipped with this understanding of the symbolism of these herbs and the intentional delivery of them as the Early Modern audience would have been, Ophelia's speech presents a different portrayal of her state of mind:

> [A portrayal of Ophelia's speech referenced above (4.5. 169-178) as though she is rational and giving herbs with direct intention]

While many modern productions of *Hamlet* depict Ophelia as mad as a result of her characterisation within the play, through a greater understanding of what this characterisation would have meant in the Early Modern period and what caused women to be identified as mad, a potentially more traditional portrayal of Ophelia reveals her to be quite rational. Ophelia's effort to undermine the power of Claudius and the Queen would likely be considered an act of folly by Early Modern audiences due to the lack of power held by women during this time.

Moreover, Ophelia subverts Claudius and the Queen further by claiming that her father "made a good end" (4.5.178). This is highly ironic as her father was murdered and thus denied the possibility to repent and seek forgiveness. This mention of a good end also references the King's own murder and similar denial of a good end, further challenging the good reputation of Claudius and his stable power. This subversive commentary reinforces Ophelia's categorisation as mad within this play, and highlights the importance of

understanding the meaning and uses of words in their historical context, as words can change over time. What modern audiences consider to be madness is quite different from what these plays suggest the Early Modern understanding of madness was, supported by the definitions recorded in the OED. Consequently, in our modern understanding Ophelia is not mad but rather making undesirable commentary on the nature of individuals in the court, and being dismissed as mad as a result.

This rational portrayal of Ophelia and her identification as mad according to Early Modern definitions of this term is further highlighted by Laertes' response to Ophelia's gifts. Laertes claims that Ophelia's actions are "a document in madness – thoughts and remembrance fitted!" (4.5.172). While Laertes marks Ophelia's actions as a lesson in madness, he acknowledges that she is appropriately connecting thoughts and remembrance, thus highlighting the rationality to her speech and actions. This seemingly creates an oxymoron as Laertes pronounces his sister to be both rational and the ideal example of madness. However, it is possible that Shakespeare is using this comment of Laertes' to foreshadow Ophelia's actions immediately following this comment, and how they are an epitome of madness as folly and imprudence resulting from a rejection of the traditional gender roles for women. Ophelia's effort to undermine the power of Claudius and the Queen would likely be considered an act of foolishness by Early Modern audiences due to the lack of power held by women during this time, consequently reinforcing Ophelia's categorisation as mad. Thus, Laertes' response to Ophelia's gift of rosemary and pansies highlights the gendered construction and categorisation of madness during the Early Modern period and its foundations in traditional gender norms of the time.

Ophelia dies in Act 4 of the play, and though her death is not acknowledged as suicide by the Queen and the court, these characters have motivation to claim Ophelia's death an accident in order to save Ophelia's soul. Self-murder in Early Modern England, what modern

audiences understand as suicide, was both a civil and religious crime (MacDonald, 132). As Michael MacDonald acknowledges in his book, *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England*, those that committed suicide were punished after death: “Suicides were denied funerals and burial in the churchyard, the rites that marked the transmigration of Christian souls into the afterlife and membership in the community of the dead” (132). Thus, it was an important legal procedure to declare an individual’s death a suicide. Janet Clare, in her article “‘Buried in the Open Fields’: Early Modern Suicide and the Case of Ofelia,” claims that it was important to determine whether a suicide was “*felo de se* (felon of himself) or *non compos mentis* (not sound of mind) or whether the death was accidental” (242). Within Shakespeare’s text, the Queen suggests that Ophelia’s suicide was actually an accident, as “there on the pendent boughs her crownet weeds / Clambering to hand, an envious sliver broke” (4.7.170-171). Through claiming Ophelia’s death to be an accident, the Queen may be attempting to save Ophelia’s soul and ensure that Ophelia receives a proper burial. However, understanding the punishment that Ophelia would suffer were her society to determine her death a suicide, the Queen has significant motivation to portray Ophelia’s death as an accident, even if it was suicide. Thus, the audience cannot trust the Queen’s testimony in respect to Ophelia’s death as it is favourable for the Queen and Ophelia’s family for her suicide to be marked an accident. However, the Gravediggers acknowledge the potential that Ophelia’s death was intentional suicide, as the first gravedigger inquires “is she to be buried a Christian burial, when she wilfully seeks her own salvation” (5.1.1-2). Through introducing this ambiguity surrounding Ophelia’s death, Shakespeare suggests to the audience that the Queen’s account may be inaccurate. Furthermore, Neely recognises the common occurrence of drowning among women as she proposes, “in England during this period, drowning was the most common type of female suicide” (55). Shakespeare’s use of the most common means of suicide among women for

Ophelia's death to further subvert the Queen's testimony, suggesting that Ophelia's death may be intentional rather than accidental.

Yet, despite Shakespeare's suggestion that Ophelia's death may be intentional, her suicide is not a product of true madness or insanity as contemporary interpretations of the play would have audiences believe, but rather is Ophelia's final act of empowerment through which she attempts to defy her patriarchal society by removing all power it has over her. Though Early Modern society had some understanding of mental illness and what they termed melancholy, such as Burton's *The Essential Anatomy of Melancholy*, modern audiences have far more clinical knowledge of mental health. It is consequently incredibly difficult for modern audiences to view an act of suicide as separate and distinct from mental illnesses. However, suicide was relatively common among female characters in Early Modern drama and did not, for the Early Modern audience, necessitate mental illness. Furthermore, while Ophelia grieves for her father, she does not express symptoms of severe depression or suicidal ideation. Rather, Shakespeare portrays Ophelia as working to undermine the power of the court and highlight the corruption present, and thus suggests that her suicide is an intentional act of defiance.

Ophelia's suicide can be seen as both an act of empowerment and submission. Through committing suicide she finally releases herself from the oppression of her patriarchal society, and consequently defies this society's efforts to silence her. However, simultaneously Ophelia is denying herself the ability to continue speaking out against her oppressive society, silencing herself and thus allowing the patriarchy to discredit her previous subversive commentary through this act that her society can attribute as one of madness. Through creating this duality and contentious dynamic between defiance and resignation Shakespeare is able to emphasise the inability to defeat the patriarchy through acts of suicide.

Thus, Ophelia's final act reinforces the early modern audience's understanding of the power of gender roles and the consequences of trying to break out of these traditional expectations.

However Shakespeare does not disqualify the possibility of fighting the patriarchy, but rather emphasises that the consequences of this fight are unavoidable and that condemnation is inevitable. Though Ophelia is condemned as mad when speaking out against the court, it is during these periods that she is most capable of challenging the power of her society, and when her efforts to undermine the court's power are most effective. Thus, it is through her suicide that Shakespeare emphasises the importance of fighting through speaking out rather than through extreme action such as the one Ophelia elects. Instead of condemning the fight against the patriarchy, Shakespeare uses his portrayal of female madness and Ophelia's final suicide as a means to condemn suicide as a form of revolt against the patriarchy, highlighting the difficulties of the fight but the inability to fight without a voice.

Interestingly, this reflects the portrayals of male madness exhibited by Hamlet, in Shakespeare's text, and Hieronimo, in Kyd's earlier play, as both of these characters contemplate their desire for suicide but the necessity that they take action. Through this comparison between Shakespeare's eponymous character and his heroine, Shakespeare further highlights how women are breaking gender norms by taking action through speaking out, and emphasises that it is this breaking of gender norms that is most effective as it is the action these women take that most unsettle their society. However, through this comparison Shakespeare may also be suggesting that Hamlet, and men who play a similar role in revenge tragedies, are not breaking gender norms as much as they could, as it was the expectation of men to take action, thus society would expect them to choose revenge over suicide. Through contrasting Ophelia and Hamlet within his text Shakespeare is able to highlight the different expectations of each gender and the ways in which his characters are breaking away from these expectations.

Ultimately Ophelia's patriarchal society reclaims her and discredits her previous subversions upon her death, portraying her as a tragic victim of her own melancholy. Thus, Shakespeare's portrayal of Ophelia throughout the play provides a commentary on Early Modern English society and the position of women within this that can only truly be understood in combination with an understanding of the traditional gender roles and expectations of women at this time and the consequent use of madness to identify departures from these expectations. Furthermore, through this portrayal Shakespeare also investigates the effectiveness of suicide as a method of defiance. Shakespeare highlights the importance and necessity of having a voice while fighting the patriarchy and the ability for the patriarchy to further discredit acts of rebellion in cases that result in suicide through reclaiming these revolutionary women as victims of their own character.

While these portrayals of male and female madness resulting from rejections of gender expectations are common among Early Modern revenge tragedies, it is important to recognize that not all portrayals of madness in Early Modern drama, or in Early Modern revenge tragedies, stem from this definition of madness. There are similarly frequent instances of madness as "insanity; mental illness or impairment," such as in the case of King Lear in Shakespeare's play of the same name (1606), or Ferdinand, the Duke of Calabria, in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614) (Madness, OED). Thus, while not all instances of madness present in Early Modern literature are reflections of the traditional gender roles and the consequences for breaking these, the multiple definitions of madness within the OED highlight the use of the term madness to categorise these departures from gender expectations for men and women.

A close study of Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* reveal the multiple different definitions of madness that were in use in Early Modern English society, as recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary. Kyd and Shakespeare use their

plays in particular to explore the nature of madness as a means of characterising individuals who revolt against the traditional gender norms of their society and the behavioural expectations that their society held for each gender. This identification acted as a way for the patriarchal society of England at this time to dismiss and discredit women who made subversive commentary about the court and society, and thus was a means through which men could maintain and stabilise their power. Similarly, for men acting outside of their traditional gender roles, the classification of these men as mad allowed the patriarchy to maintain high standards for male actions and through this maintain power and dismiss feminine characteristics as inferior. Neely records Early Modern society's focus on helping those identified as mad to recover. She claims, "the mad were cared for with compassion and provided with remedies that, whether medical or ingenious, seek to coax them back to their "business," back into the rituals of everyday life" (67). This emphasis on recovery, in relation to Shakespeare's use of madness as the identification of a break away from traditional gender roles, may identify an effort by the patriarchy to encourage these individuals identified as mad to return to the behaviour expected of them, as their deviant behaviour acts as a threat to the security of the patriarchal society.

Further research into the portrayals of genuine madness, as not all madness results from defying gender norms, could potentially reveal similar differences in gender in terms of what qualifies as madness and the types of mental illness and insanity that are accredited to the different genders. Similarly, such research may reveal further divisions between the many different definitions of madness during the Early Modern period and their application in plays, creating more distinct categories of madness that align with portrayals of each definition. Additionally, in her book Vaught explores the "gradual emergence of men of feeling in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literary texts and the blossoming of this popular version of manhood during the eighteenth century" (2). She suggests that this

increasing presence of emotional men in texts is reflective of the growing support for Augustinian notions of gender roles and the development of sensibility within the role of men. Vaught proposes that Hamlet is also reflective of this growing trend. While this paper highlights Shakespeare's portrayal of extreme emotion in men as a form of madness, Vaught's text may illuminate Shakespeare's work as a commentary on the Early Modern reaction to the beginnings of a change in male gender roles and the increasing emotionality of men in this society. As a consequence of the divergent nature of definitions of madness in use during the Early Modern period from modern understandings of the term, Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* necessitate knowledge in current audiences of the use of this term during the Early Modern period along with the traditional gender roles of the time in order to truly appreciate and understand these plays. Moreover, Shakespeare's portrayals of madness can also be seen in works by his successors, such as in *The White Devil* by Webster (1612), and *The Maid's Tragedy* by Beaumont and Fletcher (1619).

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