

# **Pregnant with Madness— Ophelia's Struggle and Madness in *Hamlet***

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## **Abstract**

Madness in *Hamlet* is one of the crucial themes for Shakespeare to depict the chaotic turbulence in the Hamlet family and the court of Denmark. Due to Claudius's usurpation of the Old Hamlet's crown and queen, characters such as Hamlet, Ophelia, and Gertrude suffer seriously from betrayal, resentment, and enrage. Even though she is generally read as a minor character in *Hamlet*, Ophelia in madness reveals particularly the struggle of the female character that endeavors to have a voice of her own. Throughout the play, Ophelia displays a three-phased transformation from Polonius' timid daughter who lacks the will of her own, to the seducer on mission who suddenly reveals the bawdy part of her nature and, finally to the mad woman who liberally expresses her oppressed feelings and sorrow with lyrics and songs. Lost in her failed love with Hamlet and sorrow from the death of her father, Ophelia's madness represents the destructed mind without the Name-of-the-Father and the reconstruction of her liberated subjectivity. Through the analysis of her language which is both pregnant in and with madness, her madness is interpreted as the means to express her real being without the patriarchal manipulation. Also, her madness can be read as the assimilation with Hamlet since it is how she revives Hamlet's love. Even though her insanity cannot be properly read by others, Ophelia struggles to constitute a subject of her own through madness. Finally, her dramatic death symbolizes the Narcissus-like combination of her own images and the opportunity to recover her name of innocence with Gertrude's narration which belongs specifically to the kind of female mourning.

**Keywords:** madness, the Name-of-the-Father, assimilation, subjectivity.

## I. Ophelia's Role and Her Transformation

Among the characters of *Hamlet*, Ophelia has never been specified as a complicated one. Critics like Linda Welshimer Wagner believe that “Shakespeare intended her to be a minor character, using her sparingly and almost forgetfully throughout the plot” (94). Moreover, Wagner indicates that Ophelia is “an ironic parallel … as compared with that of the Queen, whose equally simple, rather carnal attitudes have led her into deepest sin” (94). For Hamlet, his hatred for Gertrude impels him to label Ophelia as the Queen’s kind: a frail woman who fails to control her carnal desire. In comparison with Gertrude, Ophelia is rather a sinner-to-be. Instead of being as guilty as Gertrude, Ophelia is doomed to commit adultery someday. For the male characters in the play—such as Hamlet, Polonius, and even Claudius—Ophelia is merely a convenient tool to be exploited and manipulated. David Leverenz concludes Ophelia’s dramatic function in the play to be that “[e]veryone has used her: Polonius, to gain favor; Laertes, to belittle Hamlet; Claudius, to spy on Hamlet; Hamlet, to express rage at Gertrude and Hamlet again, to express his feigned madness with her as decoy”(302). Being neglected and exploited, Ophelia’s madness seems to be inevitable. Her madness has invited various interpretations. Critics like A.C. Bradley consider the overwhelmed Ophelia to be still “beautiful, sweet, lovable, pathetic, and dismissible” (qtd. in Neely 322). On the other hand, feminist critics interpret her madness to be “her liberation from silence, obedience, and constraint or her absolute victimization by patriarchal oppression” (322). Curiously, Ophelia’s madness can be read as something beautiful because of its vulnerability yet it is also inspiring because her madness breaks through the patriarchal refrain. These two different interpretations demonstrate the ambiguity and flexibility of Ophelia’s madness. Despite the fact that Ophelia is generally considered a minor character in *Hamlet*, her madness and death actually present much more layers behind her timid and obedient appearances. In other words, Ophelia is more than just a flat character that Shakespeare arranges to play as Gertrude’s double or to strengthen the tragic effects of the play. With her transformation from the obedient daughter of Polonius to the mad woman who speaks of bawdy connotations at the court, Ophelia’s madness displays her inner conflicts and plight that she fails to ease. The transformation of Ophelia’s character from the submissive girl to the desperately mad woman can be divided into three phases. Before the chamber visit of Hamlet, Ophelia faithfully plays the role of a coy lover and her father’s naive daughter. During this phase, Ophelia is dominated by Polonius’ will—in Lacan’s term, Ophelia is occupied by the-Name-of-the-Father. Between the chamber visit and Hamlet’s nunnery speech, Ophelia gradually displays her bawdy side and acts out the role of a

seducer that Claudius and Polonius assign her. At the last phase, her tragic fate finally forces her to confront her real inner self that she constantly represses. Hidden behind the appearances of an obedient daughter, Ophelia goes through a transformation from the passive and frail woman to the woman who finally relocates her true identity—the self that can't be comprehended by the patriarchal logic system. In other words, the transformation reveals her struggle between the exploited sanity and the awakened yet incomprehensible femininity.

With her mad language that is both pregnant *with* and *in* madness, Ophelia endeavors to constitute her own voice that truly expresses her predicaments. Also, her madness represents her assimilation with Hamlet, who is similarly mad. Her assimilation allows her to revive Hamlet's lost love for her. Like Hamlet, Ophelia also adopts madness to be a means to confront death and betrayal. In other words, madness provides them a space for escape from the cruel reality. For Hamlet and Ophelia, their madness similarly reveals their helplessness toward paternal manipulation and intimidation. Feigned or not, both Hamlet and Ophelia apply madness to survive the oppression from Claudius and Polonius. With madness, Hamlet and Ophelia faithfully express their inner struggles. They both suffer profoundly from the inward conflict that is too overwhelming to be solved. Therefore, madness is the only way for them to reveal their predicament and repression. Ironically, their madness strengthens the need to put them in careful surveillance. In other words, instead of being comprehended and comforted, Hamlet and Ophelia's madness brings them more repression and alienation. When their madness exceeds the authority's tolerance, death is the inevitable option to terminate their revel. Hamlet luckily escapes from Claudius' assassination yet falls immediately into another lethal plot. Ophelia, on the other hand, is defeated by her fate and ends up drowning *accidentally*. Madness enables her to speak with her own voice yet also tragically leads her to the "female self-driven self-destruction" (Romanska 501).

## **II. Ophelia as the Naïve and Obedient Daughter**

Before Hamlet's visit to her chamber, Ophelia appears to be a naive girl who lacks judgment and a strong will. Not only Laertes but also Polonius feels obliged to remind Ophelia of the cruelty and torment that Hamlet's love might cause her. Similar to Hamlet's misogynic attitude toward women's frailty, Laertes implies that Ophelia might lack control over her desire:

Then if he says he loves you,  
It fits your wisdom so far to believe it.

.....

Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open  
To his unmastered importunity.  
Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister.  
And keep within the rear of your affection,  
Out of the shot and danger of desire. (1.3.24-25, 31-35)<sup>1</sup>

Laertes is obviously aware of the “danger of desire” of women. He warns Ophelia not to succumb to desire when she faces Hamlet’s “unmastered importunity”.<sup>2</sup> However, in Ophelia’s defense, Hamlet’s courtship remains as “many tenders of his affection” (1.3.99). At this point, Ophelia plays the role as a coy young lady whose affection is pure and naïve. She firmly believes that Hamlet’s love is sincere and stern. Yet, regardless of the naivety of her feelings, Laertes subtly implies the possibility of Ophelia’s hasty carnality. Unlike Laertes, Polonius is much more sarcastic and harsh:

Affection, pooh! You speak like a green girl  
Unsifted in such perilous circumstance. (1.3.101-102)

He mocks at not only Hamlet’s affection but also Ophelia’s naivety. The sentence “You speak like a green girl” indicates Polonius’s expectation of Ophelia to be a more sophisticated woman—otherwise he is accusing her of pretending to be a green girl. Furthermore, he questions Ophelia: “Do you believe his ‘tenders’ as you call them?” (1.3.103). Confronted by Polonius and Laertes’ harsh instructions, Ophelia merely responds, “I do not know, my lord, what I should think” (1.3.104). Either she is tired of arguing with Polonius or really agrees with his accusation, Ophelia’s response once again fits the image that Polonius would expect her to be. She has to be the one who doesn’t know how to think or how to behave unless she is told to. Therefore, Polonius can play the manipulating father to *teach* her to “think of [herself] a baby” (1.3.105). Despite her wish to respond to Hamlet’s tender, Ophelia has chosen to obey her father’s command and refuse Hamlet’s courting ever since. This is probably why Hamlet resents her in the first place. After all, Ophelia chooses to obey her father’s command and rejects his tender as if she had no other choices. In other words, Ophelia chooses Polonius’ command over Hamlet’s affection. Similarly, Gertrude chooses to succumb to her desire and betray both Hamlet and his father. Hamlet therefore determines that it’s the frailty of womanhood that causes Gertrude and

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<sup>1</sup> The text of *Hamlet* quoted in this paper is based on *The Norton Shakespeare*.

<sup>2</sup> Laertes’ warning echoes Hamlet’s accusation of Gertrude to be incapable of controlling her desire for Claudius. Hence, both Gertrude and Ophelia are labeled as frail women, whose feminine sexuality is dangerous and unduly.

Ophelia to betray him. Consequently, both Gertrude and Ophelia turn from Hamlet's beloved women to those who damage his sanity and affection and are, thus, enemies.

The scene where Hamlet visits Ophelia's chamber leads to Claudius's arrangement of Ophelia to be the bait to investigate into the Prince's mental situation. She now transforms from the timid girl to a seducer. First of all, Ophelia's former rejection gives Hamlet a legitimate reason to act out his madness. Ophelia's betrayal is not surprising for Hamlet at all. In fact, he needs her betrayal to execute his plots. Also, Ophelia is apparently overwhelmed by Hamlet's derangement when he visits her. In her description, Hamlet is not only in untidy garments but also deeply distressed:

Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced,  
No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled,  
Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle,  
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,  
And with a look so piteous in purport  
As if he had been loosed out of hell  
To speak of horrors, he comes before me. (2.1.79-85)

The unusual behavior of Hamlet doubtlessly confuses Ophelia. She is unaware of Hamlet's meeting with the Ghost. Therefore, she couldn't comprehend Hamlet's sudden craziness except that it is the outcome of her rejection of his wooing. Later, Ophelia is further puzzled by Hamlet's way of leaving her chamber. The way he leaves Ophelia implies his hesitation and struggle:

That done, he lets me go,  
And, with his head over his shoulder turned,  
He seemed to find his way without his eyes,  
For out o' doors he went without their help,  
And to the last bended their light on me. (2.1.97-101)

With his eyes fixed on Ophelia, Hamlet leaves the chamber. For Ophelia, it's an apparent sign that Hamlet, deeply lost in love with her, is reluctant to leave her. Whether the ecstasy is out of Hamlet's device or the real status of his overwhelming mind<sup>3</sup>, Hamlet successfully convinces Ophelia and Polonius that he is mad. Without a single word from Hamlet, Ophelia believes that his madness is due to her rejection. However, her timid nature doesn't allow her to be too confident about Hamlet's

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<sup>3</sup> Since the scene happens after Hamlet's first meeting with the Ghost, Hamlet is still shocked by the truth of the murder and the Ghost's description of the purgatory.

affection. Thus, when questioned by Polonius that if Hamlet is mad because she has failed his affection, Ophelia humbly answers: “My lord, I don’t know, / But truly I do fear it” (2.1.87-88).<sup>4</sup> Her humble and simple response symbolizes her being the manipulated. Since she is used to be belittled, she could only express her opinions when she is asked to. Even when she is considered the main cause of the Prince’s madness, Ophelia can’t baldly assert her importance or express her feelings deliberately. Her voice is not only feeble but also needs to be delivered through Polonius, who recognizes himself to be Ophelia’s protector and representative. Through Polonius, Ophelia’s voice is scrutinized before it is presented.

### **III. Ophelia as the Seducer and the Beginning of Her Awakening**

Ophelia’s role turns to be important in the play during this phase. Different from Polonius and Ophelia, Claudius is not easily convinced by Hamlet’s deranged behavior. Therefore, he demands Ophelia to probe Hamlet’s madness. For Ophelia, Polonius, Claudius, and Gertrude, the mission represents different meanings. For Claudius, Hamlet’s madness is too sudden and confusing. On the one hand, he is concerned that Hamlet might sabotage his crown and his marriage to the Queen. On the other hand, if Hamlet is indeed mad, it could be an appropriate reason to get rid of him hereafter. As for Gertrude, she concludes her son’s melancholy to “His father’s death and [her] o’er-hasty marriage” (2.2.57). Obviously, she is quite aware of the fact that Hamlet is distressed by these two events. If Hamlet’s madness is due to his affection for Ophelia, Gertrude is somehow relieved from her sense of guilt for her son. As she tells Ophelia: “I do wish / That your good beauties be the happy cause / Of Hamlet’s wildness; so shall I hope your virtues / Will bring him to his wonted way again, / To both your honours” (3.1.40-43). Meanwhile, Polonius’ purpose is clear and simple: he wants to win the King and the Queen’s favor. By offering his daughter to save the Prince out of madness, Polonius is able to earn the royal family’s trust and preference. For the opportunist Polonius, he is always prepared to offer his daughter to gain more favor from Claudius. In Act II, Scene II, Hamlet calls Polonius *Jephthah*—the man who sacrifices his daughter for triumph—and Polonius frankly responds that: ‘If you call me Jephthah, my lord, I have a daughter / that I love passing well” (2.2.393-94). Doubtlessly, he neither minds being humiliated by Hamlet nor mind scarifying his daughter like Jephthah does. For Claudius and Polonius, Ophelia is a seductive object to be used in order to test Hamlet’s mental status. She is merely an object to be exploited or even sacrificed.

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<sup>4</sup> Here Ophelia’s answer echoes her former words in Act I, Scene III: “I do not know, my lord, what I should think” (1.3.104).

As for Ophelia, her purpose is rather naïve. First of all, the mission is an order from the King and her father. Therefore, she has no choice but to obey it—just as she had to obey her father's request and reject Hamlet's affection earlier. Moreover, carrying out the mission also means that she is allowed to accept Hamlet's affection now. Since Polonius and Laertes disagree with the authenticity of Hamlet's affection, Ophelia is forced to repress her true feelings for Hamlet. However, the mission enables her to express her feelings for Hamlet and disregards her father's disdain for Hamlet's affection. After all, Polonius' cynical attitude toward Hamlet's affection also implies his disapproval of his own daughter. For Polonius, Ophelia is devaluated as someone who is not worth loving—especially someone who is not worth a prince's love. In Act II, Scene II, Polonius reveals his admonition to his daughter in front of the King and the Queen: "And my young mistress thus I did bespeak: / 'Lord Hamlet is a prince out of thy star. / This must not be'" (2.2.140-142). The passage clearly expresses that Polonius doesn't consider his daughter to be Hamlet's qualified mate. By taking the mission, Ophelia regains her dignity as someone the Prince adores and gets mad for. Therefore, Ophelia is not just a green girl who wrongly estimates the Prince's love. She successfully proves her value as the remedy for the Prince's madness.

Despite their expectation, Hamlet inconsistent behavior doesn't prove Ophelia to be the remedy for his madness. In Act III, Scene I, Ophelia attempts to recall Hamlet's passion toward her:

My lord, I have remembrances of yours  
That I have longed long to redeliver.  
I pray you now receive them. (3.1.95-97)

Yet, Hamlet rejects her invitation and replies: "No, no. I never gave you aught" (3.1.98). Instead of being aroused by the past memory, Hamlet denies his affection for Ophelia immediately. Ophelia couldn't comprehend Hamlet's hostility toward her at all. Consequently, she continues to inquire Hamlet:

My honoured lord, you know right well you did,  
And with words of so sweet breath composed  
As made the things more rich. Their perfume lost,  
Take these again; for to the noble mind  
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind. (3.1.99-103)

Here Ophelia implies that her feelings are sincere yet Hamlet's are not. Therefore, the

gifts that were once enriched by Hamlet's love have now lost their perfume. To succeed in the mission that Claudius assigns her and proves her value to Polonius, Ophelia has to seduce Hamlet to reveal his affection for her. Nevertheless, just as Hamlet tells Ophelia that she shouldn't have believed him, he not only refuses to admit his feelings for her but also questions her chastity. Furthermore, he urges her that: "Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder / of sinners?" (3.1.122-23) Then he mocks her dishonesty by saying that "God / hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another" (3.1.141-42). Hamlet uses cosmetics—or paintings as he calls it—to symbolize the hypocritical masks that women put on in order to conceal their infidelity. The metaphor of one's fake face instead of the face God gives them indicates Hamlet's disgust with women's infidelity. For Hamlet, it's a pretentious and unnatural trick women play. Women are not what they are. Hamlet's misogynistic attitude demonstrates his abhorrence for hypocritical women. Since Ophelia exploits Hamlet's affection to test his madness, she is also one of those insincere women. Hence, Ophelia, the seducer, also exploits her sexuality to be a means to lure Hamlet. Certainly, Ophelia doesn't realize Hamlet's implication because she merely follows Polonius and Claudius' instruction in order to save the man she loves from madness. Yet, his cruelty crushes Ophelia's feelings. Hurt and humiliated, she moans for her lost love: "O woe is me, / T'have seen what I have seen, see what I see!" (3.1.159-60). Hamlet's enraged language is too overwhelming and unexpected for the naïve Ophelia. Being humiliated in front of her father and the King, Ophelia is once again diminished. Hamlet not only fails her love but also fails her status as the Prince's precious lover. Doubtlessly, Ophelia's mourning arouses her audience's sympathy while Hamlet is considered heartless and cruel. However, as Linda Welshimer Wagner points out, Hamlet's abuse of Ophelia is because "perhaps the frailty of women has embittered him to callousness" (95). Since Ophelia is considered to be one of the fickle women and will betray him anyhow, Hamlet would rather stop her from breeding more sinners later<sup>5</sup>. Falling from the ideal lover whom Hamlet once adored, Ophelia is now degraded to be the breeder of sinners.

Although Ophelia fails her father's expectation to win the royal family's favor, she gradually learns to express her inner feelings instead of being the girl who doesn't know what to think. After the nunnery scene, Hamlet once again mocks Ophelia's seeming innocence. In Act III, Scene II, Hamlet requests to lie on Ophelia's lap. Being rejected, Hamlet deliberately asks Ophelia that if she thinks he "meant country matters" (3.2.105). Apparently, Hamlet does imply something sexual. However,

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<sup>5</sup> Hamlet warns Ophelia to stop being the breeder of sinners is followed by his own resentment for Gertrude. He admits that he is one of the "arrant knaves," that he wishes "that it were better" his "mother had not borne" him (3.1.129, 124). Apparently, Hamlet transfers his anger for Gertrude on Ophelia.

Ophelia replies: “I think nothing, my lord” (3.2.106). Different from her timid replies such as “I don’t know what to think,” Ophelia cunningly avoids Hamlet’s mockery and bawdy jokes. Nonetheless, the word “nothing” falls into Hamlet’s sexual puns of female genitals. In replying to Hamlet’s bawdy puns, Ophelia simply answers: “You are merry, my lord” (3.2.110). Her response “indicates that she got the point well enough” (Pyles 322). Later in the scene, Hamlet once again plays similar puns and tells Ophelia that “Be not you / ashamed to show, he’ll not shame to tell you what it means” (3.2.130-31). Here Hamlet implies that if Ophelia shamelessly “shows,” she’ll get the answer. Had Ophelia not understood Hamlet’s puns, she wouldn’t have answered: “You are naught, you are naught”<sup>6</sup> (3.2.132). Serving as the functional character in the play, Ophelia is definitely more than someone who is “intellectually not remarkable” as A. C. Bradley points out (qtd. in Wagner 95). Certainly, Ophelia is unlike Desdemona, who is capable of clever and sharp conversations when confronted by Iago’s cynical jokes. Instead, Ophelia is subtler in dealing with Hamlet’s sexual puns and mockery. She doesn’t attempt to confront his vicious attack with equally bawdy puns, nor does she succumb to the embarrassing situation. Yet, Ophelia cunningly dissolves Hamlet’s wild rhetorical assaults. This is the kind of wit that the previously timid Ophelia would not display. Being gradually loosed from Polonius’ oppression, Ophelia presents her witty nature and forms her own characteristics. Despite the fact that she is still restrained by Polonius, Ophelia gradually voices her own thoughts. She is not thoroughly liberated; yet, as Katharine Goodland observes, “Ophelia is at once freed and contained by her madness” (193). The influence of patriarchal voice will not be over until madness takes over and develops a space for her own voice to be heard.

#### **IV. The Mad Woman Ophelia and Her Assimilation with Hamlet**

Ophelia’s madness is, like Hamlet’s madness, complicated and controversial. David Leverenz concludes: “[n]ot allowed to love and unable to be false, Ophelia breaks” (301). Moreover, “she goes mad rather than gets mad” (301). Leverenz’ interpretation indicates that Ophelia doesn’t lose her sanity suddenly but is pushed to the edge of reason because of the predicament that she suffers from. In other words, her awkward situation finally breaks her sanity. Her madness is circumstantially inevitable. Laing shares a similar viewpoint that “Ophelia’s ‘madness’ is a natural response to the unacknowledged interpersonal falsities of the group. Her history is another instance of how someone can be driven mad by having her inner feelings

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<sup>6</sup> According to the Norton edition, *naught* refers to *indecent*. Here Ophelia reveals her not-so-innocent understanding of Hamlet’s puns.

misrepresented, not responded to, or acknowledged only through chastisement and repression” (300). Being exploited by not only her father but also Hamlet and Claudius, Ophelia is never allowed to reveal her real feelings. She represses herself to be Polonius’ obedient daughter. Meanwhile, Hamlet imposes on her a double image of “a saint at the beginning of the scene to a painted whore by the end” (Goodland 195). Even Gertrude, who is supposed to understand her female predicament since they are both labeled as frail sinners, refuses to listen to her when she appears in madness. Transformed from the obedient daughter to the seductive bait in order to try Hamlet’s madness, Ophelia struggles to develop a space of her own. However, her being “as a sacrificial victim” oppresses the possibility for her to be heard (Goodland 188). Thus, with the death of Polonius, Ophelia falls into madness like Hamlet, whose sanity gradually collapses due to the cruel truth of his father’s death and the incestuous sin of his mother.

The death of Polonius doubtlessly overwhelms Ophelia’s world. As John Draper indicates, Ophelia’s distraught behavior is due to the fact that her “father, whom she loved so dearly, came to a sudden and shocking end” (qtd. in Camden 247). Similarly, Roderick Benedix suggests that “Polonius’ death … is the cause of Ophelia’s madness” (qtd. in Camden 247). On the one hand, Polonius’ death frees Ophelia from his manipulation. Meanwhile, the freedom represents that Ophelia is left completely alone. No instructions or guidance from this point on. For all her life, Ophelia depends on the law of Polonius—or namely, the-Name-of-the-Father that Polonius stands for—to play her role in the world. Polonius is to her the center of her desire—including the desire to be and the desire that she is prohibited from. According to Lacan, a subject constitutes his own identification through the experience of the Oedipus complex. During the Oedipus phase, the subject gradually renounces the desire for the mother and identifies with the law of the father—or namely, the Name-of-the-Father. The process of transferring from the desire for the mother to the Name-of-the-Father works as one signifier replacing another. Either the desire for the mother or the Name-of-the-Father serves as the subject’s Other in his self-identification. The identification is, for the subject, a kind of reflection of the Other’s desire. In other words, the subject’s desire is based on the Other’s desire. The subject sees himself through the eyes of the Other. Consequently, when realized that the Phallus, which is the omnipotent symbol that can satisfy the desire of the mother, belongs exclusively to the Father, the subject turns to identify with the Father and follows ever since the Name-of-the-Father. At this point, the Name-of-the-Father is the basis of the subject’s desire. The subject must behave the way he speculates the Name-of-the-Father would permit / expect. Thus, for Ophelia, she behaves the way her father expects her to since Polonius represents the Name-of-the-Father for her.

Despite the fact that Ophelia may sometimes disagree with him, she obeys him anyway because Polonius is the crucial Other for her to identify her own being.

Without the Name-of-the-Father, Ophelia is forced to confront the cruel world all by herself. Therefore, after Polonius' death, Ophelia needs to construct a voice of her own—the voice that can express her being. Moreover, she needs an object to reflect her own desire. Otherwise, Ophelia is left without the Other to identify neither her desire nor her own being. Madness is the means to her constitution of her own voice. Through madness, Ophelia substitutes the Name-of-the-Father with her own voice. She has now substituted her father to be her own *Other*. Maurice Charney and Hanna Charney point out that “her madness opens up her role … Madness enables her to assert her being; she is no longer enforced to keep silent and play the dutiful daughter” (456). Her being has never truly exhibited until the death of Polonius. Being released from the role as the obedient girl or the seducer that is exploited by Claudius and Polonius, Ophelia “breaks from the subjection of a vehemently patriarchal society and makes public display, in her verses, of the body she has been taught to suppress” (Salkeld 95). In madness, Ophelia for the first time speaks out her sorrow and pain even though her world is smashed by the death of Polonius. Ophelia in madness is definitely different from the logical and well-behaved lady under the instruction of her father. Distraught and importunate, Ophelia expresses with her very own voice now. Nonetheless, since her feminine voice is alienated from the patriarchal dominance, it cannot be comprehended and thus considered to be madness. In other words, Ophelia’s feminine voice is rather irrational and illogical because it is alienated from the patriarchal system, whose language is supposed to be rational and organized. Hence, Ophelia is identified to be mad because her language is excluded and marginalized from the-Name-of-the-Father / the patriarchal authority.

Ophelia’s madness doesn’t merely symbolize her capability of speaking for herself; it also shares many similarities with Hamlet’s madness. Some critics believe that the two mad characters function as each other’s double. Indeed, either character’s madness can not be interpreted without a detailed survey of the other. In “Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*”, Lacan points out the crucial link between Ophelia and Hamlet is that “Ophelia is … linked forever, for centuries, to the figure of Hamlet” (20). Jacquelyn Fox-Good also indicates that Ophelia “becomes Hamlet’s ‘mad-double,’ giving expression, in some sense, acting out what he cannot” (qtd. in Goodland 223). Most critics would agree with Fox-Good that Ophelia’s madness actually serves as the ‘mad-double’ that Hamlet attempts to act out. In other words, Ophelia’s madness is generally considered authentic while Hamlet’s is rather feigned. Thus, Ophelia’s madness, much similar to Hamlet’s, is drawn by Hamlet to reinforce the credibility of his own madness. Carol Thomas Neely compares the two mad

figures as such:

Gender distinctions likewise begin to take shape in the contrasts between Hamlet and Ophelia. Although in her mad scenes can be seen to serve as a double for Hamlet during his absence from Denmark and from the play, Hamlet's madness is in every way contrasted with hers, ... (325) Hamlet is presented as fashionably introspective and melancholy while Ophelia becomes alienated, acting out the madness Hamlet only plays at. (326)

Neely observes that the gender differences further present the two mad figures as contrasts. Similarly, Carol Camden suggests that “[t]hroughout the play, indeed, the appearance of Hamlet's pretended madness is contrasted with the reality of Ophelia's madness” (249). Both Neely and Camden point out that despite the authenticity of Ophelia's madness, she is marginalized and excluded while Hamlet's feigned madness remains in the center of the play. The ironical situation of Hamlet and Ophelia's madness is due to the gender differences—after all, masculinity is the dominant authority and femininity is commonly considered minor and secondary.

Other critics interpret that Ophelia's madness serves as the assimilated version of Hamlet's madness. David Leverenz points out that Ophelia “does what Hamlet preaches, or at least what he (301) feigns, in going mad. Thinking she is not loved by him, she becomes him, or at least what she conceives to be his ‘noble mind...o'verthrown’” (302). To revive Hamlet's love for her, Ophelia absorbs and imitates Hamlet's madness. She has to assimilate with him through madness. That's also why in her song, she mourns that “[h]e is dead and gone, lady, / He is dead and gone” (4.5.29-30). Since Ophelia has adopted Hamlet's madness and replaced him with her own image, Hamlet, whose love for her has faded, is considered “dead and gone” in Ophelia's mind. Later in the play, Ophelia's madness discloses more similarities with Hamlet's madness. In Act IV, Scene V, Horatio describes Ophelia's madness as such:

...Her speech is nothing,  
Yet the unshaped use of it doth move  
The hearers to collection. They aim at it,  
And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts,  
Which, as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,  
Indeed would make one think there might be thought, (4.5.7-12)

Despite its derangement and inconsistency, Ophelia's mad language not only

draws people's attention but is also rich in meanings. Laertes also indicates that in Ophelia's mad language "[t]his nothing's more than matter" (4.5.172). Interestingly, Polonius has similar description about Hamlet's madness:

How pregnant  
sometimes his replies are! A happiness that often madness hits  
on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be  
delivered of. (2.2.206-209)

Compared to normal people's language, according to Polonius, Hamlet's madness expresses a much stronger happiness that "reason and sanity" are incapable of. Hidden inside Hamlet and Ophelia's chaotic language is something incomprehensible. Nevertheless, their mad languages are not merely *nothing*. Both Hamlet and Ophelia's languages are pregnant<sup>7</sup> in madness. Or rather, they are also both pregnant *with* madness. Their "nothing" actually expresses a lot more of "something" than it appears to be. First of all, the "nothing" in their language indicates their loss of the Name-of-the-Father. The deaths of Polonius and the Old Hamlet not only refer to the loss of the real fathers but also the symbolic fathers that stand for the Name-of-the-Father. For Ophelia, her father is dead and her brother is traveling abroad. She is alienated from her patriarchal lineage at this moment. On the other hand, Hamlet lost his father and refuses to succumb to Claudius's paternal dominance. Therefore, he also lacks a proper patriarchal law to follow. The absence / nothing of the father's law fits Lacan's theory of the cause of psychosis:

When the Name-of-the-Father is foreclosed for a particular subject, it leaves a hole in the symbolic order which can never be filled; the subject can then be said to have a psychotic structure...and the result of this 'collision with the inassimilable signifier' (S3, 321) is the 'entry into psychosis' proper, characterized typically by the onset of hallucination and/or delusions. (Evans 65)

Different from the language that is governed by the Name-of-the-Father, Ophelia and Hamlet's language is constituted by the "nothing" that refers to a hole that "can never be filled" (Evans 65). The hole would always remain a gap that can't be filled by any signifiers. Yet the subject would attempt to substitute it with one signifier after another in order to fill the gap—yet just vainly. Consequently, Hamlet and Ophelia

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<sup>4</sup>Here pregnant refers to "meaningful" according to the footnote of the Norton edition. Or, as Lacan points out in "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*", the use of "pregnant" refers to "something that has a meaning beyond its meaning" (49).

appear to be mad—or as psychoses in the Lacanian term—because of the lack of the Name-of-the-Father in the Symbolic order. Accordingly, Hamlet’s language is pregnant *in* madness because his melancholy is oriented from the “nothing” that can never be properly expressed. Similarly, Ophelia’s language is also pregnant *in* madness because her self-identification is now in chaos since she has only herself to be the Other to reflect her own desire. Signifiers in their language are thus twisted and lost due to the absence of the Name-of-the-Father. Language is hence unattainable and misunderstood. Under the same token, it always refers to something else. Just as Lacan argues, their language always contains “something that has a meaning beyond its meaning” (49).

Other than being pregnant *in* madness, Hamlet’s and Ophelia’s language is also pregnant *with* madness<sup>8</sup>. Madness is for Hamlet and Ophelia the means to speak out the truth that lies beneath the masquerade-like court of Denmark. In other words, madness is purposely applied by the two characters to penetrate into the ugly reality which is covered with lies and betrayal. As T. S. Eliot sharply points out, ‘Hamlet’s ‘madness’ is less than madness and more than feigned’ (qtd. in Jones 66). So is Ophelia’s madness. Neely observes that both Hamlet and Ophelia “act out distinctions between feigned and actual madness and between rational and mad suicide, distinctions that the culture was gradually establishing” (324). With madness, Ophelia directly expresses her disappointment and sorrow for her failed love through her ballads. In her songs, she claims that “Young men will do’t if they come to’t, / By Cock, they are to blame” (4.5.59-60). Different from the naïve girl who believes in the sanctity of love, Ophelia now accuses men for their sexual exploitation of young girls. Moreover, Ophelia expresses her helplessness toward her tragic fate: “Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be” (4.5.42). Even though her language is broken and disorganized, her emotions are faithfully expressed. Hence, through madness, Ophelia forces the court to listen to her voice, as well as her torment, regret, and grief. With madness, Ophelia is able to “make a forceful assertion of” her being (Charney 459).

Feigned or not, madness of the two characters is considered dangerous and poisonous that it must be under surveillance. In Act III, Scene I, Claudius comments that “[m]adness in great ones must not unwatched go” (3.1.188). Later in Act IV, Scene V, Gertrude expresses the same idea toward Ophelia in madness because “she may strew / Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds” (4.5.14-15). Salkeld

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<sup>8</sup> Different from being pregnant *in* madness, which refers to the point that Hamlet and Ophelia’s mad language often implies something more than its literal meaning, being pregnant *with* madness indicates to the way that Hamlet and Ophelia apply madness as a means to speak out the truth that cannot be expressed in sanity. Being *pregnant with* thus refers to the fact that their language is rich with certain meanings.

indicates the danger of Ophelia's madness is that with madness, "the dutiful daughter has become a witch, a speaker of mysteries" (94). Through her deranged language, Ophelia reveals her painful situation as an exploited victim. Also, it indicates her inevitable annihilation later. Nonetheless, her madness not only foretells her own distinction but the court of Denmark's. Katherine Goodland suggests that Ophelia's "two disruptions of the court begin a process of realigning the unnatural world of Elsinore with the natural forces of the universe" (194). Furthermore, she argues that Ophelia in madness serves as the role of "an ancient female lament-poet" that she "curses and blesses the community, and prepares it for death" (197). According to Goodland, Ophelia is like Cassandra, whose prophecy is not accepted and thus is considered madness. Similar to Cassandra, Ophelia discloses the doomed future of the court and is similarly rejected. Pregnant with madness, Ophelia is capable of expressing her tragic suffering. Also, she is capable of predicting the doomed fate of the court. However, she is merely ignored because none of the people in the court would admit the corruption that is gradually destroying the court. Madness allows Ophelia to assert her being that was once oppressed and neglected. Despite the fact that Ophelia attempts to express her own feminine voice, with the form of madness, she is but excluded and denied from the authority again. Consequently, instead of being accepted and comprehended, Ophelia's madness finally leads her to self-destruction. The male-dominated authority wouldn't allow her to be either communicated to or comprehended.

Hamlet's language is also pregnant with madness because madness functions variously for him. Salkeld concludes that "madness is part of the complex game Hamlet plays: as prince and fool" (92). On the one hand, madness conceals his intention for revenge. With madness, he is able to "resist Claudius's sovereignty, and to evade the revenge encounter at the same time" (92). On the other hand, madness allows him to respond to the cruel world with cynicism. Like Ophelia, Hamlet reveals his wrath and disgust through madness. Nevertheless, Ophelia expresses her inner struggle through ballads and songs. For Hamlet, he applies the way a clown would do according to the Shakespearean tradition: irony and puns. Lacan analyzes this characteristic of Hamlet in detail:

One of Hamlet's functions is to engage in constant punning, word play, double-entendre—to play on ambiguity... court jesters whose position allows them to uncover the most hidden motives, the character traits that cannot be discussed frankly without violating the norms of proper conduct. ... Well, Hamlet, in a certain sense, must be considered one of these clowns (33).

Since the truth violates “the norms of proper conduct,” Hamlet simply applies madness as the valid way to express his resistance. Both Ophelia and Hamlet manipulate madness to express the insoluble struggle inside. As Duncan Salkeld argues, the “division of subjectivity that both Hamlet and Ophelia experience … is an effect of the political and social failure that expends throughout the play” (96). Neely points out similarly that the cause of Ophelia’s madness “is sexual frustration, social helplessness, and enforced control over women’s bodies” (325). Being oppressed and rejected by the patriarchal authority, Ophelia’s sanity finally collapses and she steps into the realm of madness. Madness in the play reveals not only the inner struggle of the characters but also the disorderliness of the society from the outside. Ophelia and Hamlet are doomed to experience the collapse of the family, social and political hierarchy. They are both forced to be torn between the repressed sanity and the unattainable madness. With their language being pregnant in and with madness, Ophelia and Hamlet endeavor to break through the cruelty of death and betrayal that they are deeply and painfully plunged into.

## V. Death as the Final Destination of Struggle and Madness

From the obedient girl to the seductress, and finally, being released by madness, Ophelia illustrates the transformation of a naïve heart gradually destructed by hatred and betrayal. Death is the ultimate solution for her struggle because she is unable to be either sane yet repressed or mad but not understood by any. Madness enables her to “bring her imaginative energies to fruition” (Charney 459). Through ballads, Ophelia frankly displays her inner being and mourning for the dead by the various metaphors of flowers. Fox-Good indicates that Ophelia’s ballads are “full of meaning yet inexplicable, mysterious, beyond signification” (qtd. in Goodland 197). Also, her song functions as “a jourssance which breaks the symbolic chain” (197) and is “against the voices of characters who speak the language composed, as Hamlet says of words, words, words” (197). To attain the jourssance, Ophelia applies madness to fight against the repression of the Name-of-the-Father. Nonetheless, madness also alienates her from the center of the patriarchal authority. The mad Ophelia is considered dangerous and importunate. Even Gertrude rejects her madness in the beginning. In Act IV, Scene V, Gertrude reveals her impatience for the importunate Ophelia: “I will not speak with her” (4.5.1). When Ophelia is singing her ballads at the court, Gertrude attempts to interrupt her for several times—just like Claudius does later. Instead of identifying with Ophelia’s female mourning and repression, Gertrude tries to interrupt her feminine voice as Polonius and Claudius do. Rather than sharing her female

mourning, Gertrude plays the role as a part of the patriarchal repression that manipulates Ophelia. Not even supported by Gertrude, the other female character in the play, Ophelia's madness simply leads her to isolation and finally, death.

Like her madness, her death also invites diverse interpretations. David Leverenz argues that "Ophelia's drowning signifies the necessity of drowning both words and feelings" (303). Drowning signifies her dilemma: sane or insane, she's never properly understood. Moreover, Carroll Camden argues that Ophelia's death evokes the Elizabethan audience's sympathy to consider her "as a girl suffering physically and mentally the pangs of rejected love" (255). Linda Welshimer Wagner shares a similar point. She believes that "Shakespeare's chief dramatic use of Ophelia is the evocation of pathos," and not surprisingly, "Ophelia is created as an extremely sympathetic portrait from the first scene" (Wagner 96). In addition to arouse sympathy, Goodland suggests that Ophelia's death also "engenders the poisoned and purifying violence out of which 'stolid' Horatio emerges to tell his tale" (199). Her death arouses the fight between Hamlet and Laertes and later on leads to the duel. Consequently, it's her death that speeds the doomed ending of the court. Since Ophelia in madness refuses to be manipulated, her femininity-embedded image can not last long on the Elizabethan stage. Thus, decorated with flowers, "Ophelia's body reads as 'a document in madness,' inscribed with an insanity soon to be erased altogether" (Salkeld 95). As for Hamlet, who appears to be in deep remorse for Ophelia's death, is interpreted by Dover Wilson as merely "acts the lover he fain would have been" (qtd. in Jones 85). At the graveyard scene, Hamlet declares that he did love Ophelia once:

I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers  
Could not with all their quantity of love  
Make up my sum. (5.1.270-73)

By comparing his love as surpassed in the quantity of forty brothers' love, Hamlet actually intends to compete with Laertes rather than to express his profound affection for Ophelia. The series of exaggerated speeches that Hamlet and Laertes propose in this scene are mainly to remark the vengeance of the two resembled characters. Through the three stages of Ophelia's transformation, Hamlet's attitude for her also changes. Ophelia is at first for Hamlet "the object *in* his desire" (Muller 151), and then to be "completely null and dissolved as a love object," and finally "something like a reintegration of the object *a*, won back here at the price of mourning and death" (153). In other words, Ophelia once again revives her position as the object of Hamlet's desire through death. Lacan believes that "only insofar as the object of Hamlet's desire has become an impossible object can it become once more the object

of his desire” (153). Only the unattainable object is the object that Hamlet longs for. Thus, death enables Ophelia to be the coveted object for Hamlet again because from now on, she is forever unattainable.

Ophelia’s death is the final destination of her struggle and madness. Despite her suspicious death, Ophelia not only evokes Hamlet’s affection but also revives her name of innocence. Shakespeare arranges Gertrude, Ophelia’s only female partner in the play, to announce the death of Ophelia. Intriguingly, Gertrude adopts a similar tone of Ophelia’s ballads to announce her death. Different from the Queen who appears to reject Ophelia’s madness previously, Gertrude now inherits Ophelia’s female mourning voice. Michael Neill indicates that Gertrude’s narration is “one of the most elaborately ornamented narrative exercise in Shakespeare” that it includes a “pretty fantasy” in which Gertrude … decorates Ophelia’s death with tokens of floral innocence” (qtd. in Goodland 233). Also, Goodland argues that Gertrude’s narration has “a sense of poetic justice in” her “restoration of Ophelia’s lost innocence” (197). Neely, similarly, points out that Gertrude’s narration contains “a beautiful, ‘natural,’ ritual of passage and purification, the mad body’s inevitable return to nature” (327). Moreover, Magda Romanska observes that “Gertrude’s description alone emphasizes the accidental nature of Ophelia’s death, adding to her image of existential vacuum, and creating a void filled in by the aesthetic imagination” (496). Different from the rational yet cruel masculine world of murder and conspiracy, Gertrude’s narration provides Ophelia a romantically ornamented space of death, where her “immortal mortal beauty and enigmatic mind always remain the same” (501). Furthermore, Gertrude’s narration of Ophelia’s drowning not only revives her name of innocence but also renders her a proper burial. According to the Renaissance tradition, if Ophelia committed suicide instead of being drowned accidentally, she couldn’t be properly buried—and she would end up like Polonius, whose improper burial causes Ophelia’s profound remorse and Laertes’ rage. Nonetheless, as Neely indicates, “[m]adness … renders suicide innocent and permitted conventional inheritance and burial” (327). Therefore, Ophelia is allowed a proper burial because of Gertrude’s narration. Additionally, as Carolyn G. Heilbrun observes, Gertrude “is the only one present decently mourning the death of someone young, and not heated in the fire of some personal passion” (14). Gertrude’s poetic narration presents a feminine bond between the Queen and Ophelia. Different from the vicious plotting and cruel murder among the male characters, the sentimental bond that links the two female characters renders a distinctive touch of femininity—it’s mysterious, romantic, refreshing, and tender. Unlike the Old Hamlet and Polonius, Ophelia is decently mourned. Most importantly, her story is beautifully told! With Gertrude’s sensuous feminine narration, Ophelia is able to revive her innocent name and rests as those “peace-parted souls” (5.1.221).

The drowning of Ophelia also reminds her audience of the image of Narcissus. Through the three stages of Ophelia's transformation, she gradually develops her own voice to express herself without the manipulation of the patriarchal authority. Before she falls into the brook, Ophelia must have seen her own image mirrored by the water—like Narcissus does. Her drowning somehow echoes Lacan's theory on the mirrored / split subjects. Torn between the refrained sanity and liberated madness, Ophelia finally combines the two subjects that project and reflect each other. According to Gertrude, Ophelia still “charted snatches of old tunes, / As one incapable of her own distress, / Or like a creature native and endued / Unto the element” (4.7.148-151) until the water “[p]ulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay / To muddy death” (4.7.153-54). From the “melodious lay” to the “muddy death”, Ophelia's struggle comes to an end. Death embraces sorrow, hatred, betrayal, and madness. Even though Ophelia is never considered a major character in Shakespeare's masterpieces, her misery and madness evoke not only the Elizabethan audience's pathos but also those afterwards. Despite the fact that her mad language still remains incomprehensible and rejected at the end of the play, Ophelia's struggle and predicament are faithfully expressed through the three phases of her transformation. Moreover, in comparison to Gertrude, who stays undecided and ambiguous throughout the play, Ophelia's tragedy further highlights the complexity of her role. As Charney argues, “only imaginative women have the capacity for either true or feigned madness” on the stage (459). Ophelia is such an example. She adopts madness to assert her being and break through the oppression. When that's done, Ophelia embraces herself in the water and meets her tranquil death in which “The rest is silence” (5.2.300).

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## 富含寓意的瘋狂：《哈姆雷特》裡奧菲麗亞的困境與瘋狂

### 摘要

在《哈姆雷特》一劇中，莎士比亞運用了瘋狂來描述整個家庭與宮廷所深陷其中的風暴。肇始於克勞迪亞的篡位及亂倫的婚姻，劇中如哈姆雷特及奧菲麗亞等的角色皆經歷了背叛，憎恨，及狂怒的痛苦。即使始終被定位成次要的角色，瘋狂的奧菲麗亞在本劇中展現了女性角色在努力建構屬於自己的聲音的所面臨的掙扎。綜觀全劇，奧菲麗亞經歷了三個不同的階段。由缺乏自我意識的溫馴女兒到忽然顯現出粗鄙性格的誘餌，以及最後成為掙脫了父權壓制而得以自由的表現出內心真正的悲傷與掙扎的瘋癲女子！她的瘋狂起始於被哈姆雷特拋棄及她父親的死亡。而也因此，瘋狂對她而言所展現出的是一個因失去父之名而茫然失措的心靈以及其後她所努力再建構的自我主體。本文藉由探討在她的瘋癲語言中不僅富含深意且另有它指的特性來主張對她來說，瘋狂的語言代表著她逐漸掙脫父權主宰的束縛並建立能夠表達自我的女性語言。同時，她的瘋狂也可解讀為與哈姆雷特的同化。藉此同化，奧菲麗亞得以重拾已逝的感情。即便她的瘋狂語言並不為其他人所理解或接受，卻是她努力重建自我主體的歷程。最後，她那戲劇性的死亡象徵著一種與自我合為一體的自我情結。也因為歌楚那專屬於女性哀悼方式所呈現的敘述，奧菲麗亞得以在最後重獲她純真的名聲。

關鍵字：瘋狂，父之名，同化，自我主體。

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