Madness and Memory: Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *King Lear*

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Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1601) and *King Lear* (1605-06) offer those interested in changing memory systems a unique opportunity to gauge the practical and worldly attitudes toward memory that occur in the Renaissance. The plays do so by showing natural memory's relation to "madness" or the inability of individuals to function in the world. In providing intelligibility, memory, as Edward Grimestone writes in his Introduction to Nicholas Coeffeteau's *A Table of Humane Passions* (1621), relies on the proper registering, storage, and retrieval of forms. Memory serves the sensitive soul and knowledge by representing continually "unto the common sense the forms which are consigned unto her." It also serves the intellectual powers and will by faithfully retrieving these same forms "enlightened with the light of the understanding and purged from the sensible and singular conditions which they retain in the imagination" and "representing them general . . . under the form of good and evil." In the plays, Shakespeare introduces Ophelia and Lear whose memories are clearly disrupted by madness. In addition,
he presents Hamlet and Edgar who feign madness and whose memories, one presumes, remain intact. The differences within the individual plays of Ophelia's and Lear's real and Hamlet's and Edgar's mock illnesses as well as the differences between the mental states of Ophelia and Lear reveal not only how much a Simonidean memory system based on correspondences between a microcosm and macrocosm has taken root but also how, by positing an intermediary ordering reference point in a demicosm (much like the interior ordering vanishing points of Renaissance painting), a basis for worldly or human understanding is created. In moving from subjective to objective to divine orders, art for intelligibility need no longer pursue the divine.

The Renaissance inherited from classical times a complex system of causes for madness, and, as Michel Foucault has pointed out, by the time that works such as Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* (1509) began to appear, the subjective nature of insanity seems to have gained a foothold. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato speaks of four types of "divine madness." Each is considered a "blessing," and each comes from without. Each, moreover, is ruled by a different deity. Apollo presides over prophetic madness, Dionysus over ritual or telestic madness, the Muses over poetic madness, and Aphrodite and Eros over erotic madness. In addition, the Greeks understood madness as a form of disease. Herodotus inclines to explain the madness of Cambyses as congenital epilepsy, and Empedocles and his school grant madness due to bodily injury and ailments. The Greek physician Hippocrates speculates on the influence of blood, phlegm, choler, and melancholy on physical disease, and, later, Galen "advances the theory that these four humors are, by excess or deficiency, responsible not only for physical disease but also for the peculiarities of behavior." Galen's views on the effects of these humors on human behavior remain dominant throughout the Middle Ages and become the basis of Juan Huarte's and Timothy Bright's treatises of 1580 and 1586 respectively. In *Bedlam on the Jacobean Stage* (1952), Robert Reed judges the debt of English drama after 1600 to Bright's work and the appearance of plays such as *Hamlet* and the first part of Thomas Dekker's *The Honest Whore* (1604). Bright replaces the older, less medical Senecan model of theatrical madness, which saw insanity inflicted by shock, "suddenly and without pathological cause upon the hero." An initial humor tendency is now shown
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to have been in place. "Melancholy without adustion (the sudden combustion of the humor)" emerged as "the most common Elizabethan mental disorder."2

Shakespeare and his contemporaries also had Bedlam and the actions of real Bedlamites to build upon. Reed ventures from "the repeated testimony of Jacobean drama . . . that Bethlehem Hospital was not only regularly open to the public, but also had actually become one of the more talked-about and popular amusements of the city." Visitors could expect to see inmates suffering from delusional insanity, phrenitis, melancholy, dementia praecox, and even, on occasion, to meet a political malcontent. Reed argues that scenes in Jacobean drama and the behavior assigned to some mad characters may derive from first-hand observations of Bedlamites by the playwright and that these observations and incorporations into drama may be in part a reaction to the general popularity of visits to the hospital and a Jacobean demand for spectacle. Noting that "the vogue of group madness began and ended with the Jacobean period," Reed ventures that the predisposition for the unusual, strange, and unexpected extended even to King James and Buckingham. In serious drama, mad characters "betray the most extensive debt to the theories of melancholy and of insanity as they were promulgated by Bright." In comedy, the emphasis on humors "indicates a much closer debt to Huarte's theory of behavior." A good part of the Bedlamites in Jacobean drama offer "mere variety show amusements" or become either the instruments or the butts of satire, though at times, as in Act IV, Scene ii of John Webster's The Duchess of Malfi (1613-14), they can "materially heighten the intense and macabre horror of a scene" and at other times become "symbolic expressions" of human disillusionment or human inconsequentiality, illustrating and reflecting "the skepticism present in the intellectual thought of the period."3

Shakespeare's linking of madness in Hamlet and King Lear to certain workings of language may have bearing as well on other tendencies that Russell Fraser sees at work in the early seventeenth century. In The Language of Adam (1977), Fraser notes that at the century's start "the forging of an exact correspondence between names and things becomes a matter of impatient concern." In The Advancement of Learning (1605), Sir Francis Bacon "calls for the elaborating of a system of characters, kindred as he imagines to Chinese ideograms, and able to 'express neither letters nor words in gross but things or
notions’. Later, in “The Natural Language of Languages” (1655), Henry Edmundson will propose a contrasting “aural” language based on a resemblance “of words with the things which by the sound they are made to signify.” Fraser ascribes these resurgences of Augustinian inquiry as concerned with realities and signs (res et signa) to an emotional reaction that accompanied the break-up of “catholicity” in the Church. In the midst of an expanding temporal, physical, technological, linguistic, and religious universe, fears that the eloquence of words, being man-made and conventional and themselves things, could undermine the immeasurably greater eloquence of realities (res) began to resurface. Eventually, in providing “a single natural law imprinted in the hearts of all men which no diversity can efface,” Nature would begin to approach the Church and the Bible as containing “significant and lively characters, or hieroglyphs, of [God’s] invisible power.” Through the experimental method, it would provide scientists with a corollary “invisibility” and correspondence of word and thing that approximates Augustinian verba et res.4 But for Shakespeare and his day, the doubts belonging to the break-up must have provoked more an urgent and troubling response in confusion than the calming prospect of an eventual resolution.

I

The description of Ophelia’s mad state establishes the terms of madness in Hamlet. Horatio and the Queen are told that she “speaks things in doubt/ That carry but half sense. Her speech is nothing,/ Yet the unshaped use of it doth move/ The hearers to collection.” The gentleman goes on to say that the hearers, like so many subsequent audiences, “botch the words up fit to their own thoughts” (IV.v.6-10). Thus, one can see that madness interrupts memory’s contact with both the sensitive soul and one’s will. Speech normally should move one’s thoughts (“collection”) to the correct stored forms. Here it does not, because inaccurate signs are chosen. The words do not signify to others what Ophelia wants to express and hence cannot retrieve forms which will allow hearers to understand what she says. They must interpose. Yet, one is told that, in contrast to Hamlet’s earlier “Words, words, words” (II.ii.192) and dislodged verbal eloquence, her words have “some frame” (III.ii. 308-09) and with her accompanying “winks and nods and gestures” evoke the impression that “there might be thought,/
Though nothing sure” (IV.v.11-13). Later in the scene, the King and Laertes will make this bond of memory and madness even more explicit. Witnessing Ophelia’s mad behavior, the King pronounces, “Poor Ophelia/ Divided from herself [i.e., memory] and her fair judgment” and, in a reference to Nebuchadnezzar’s madness (Daniel 4.29-30), asserts that without judgment “we are pictures, or mere beasts” (IV.v.84-86). Hearing Ophelia’s linking of rosemary with remembrance and pantries with thought, Laertes sees the division and reversal as a lesson in madness and notes that normally “thoughts and remembrance [are] fitted” (IV.v.178-79). Madness becomes, consequently, a closing off of one’s self from others and from one’s past through a breakdown in the verba-res bond.

This breakdown in normal memory patterns is independent of and differs from the changes that Shakespeare allows to occur in the significations assigned to the “places” of artificial memory tables. Despite Hamlet’s telling Osric that to divide Laertes’ virtues “inventorily would dozy th’ arithmetic of memory” (V.ii.113-14), Hamlet can without fear of madness promise the Ghost that “from the table of my memory/ I’ll wipe away all trivial fond records,/ All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past/ That youth and observation copied there” (I.v.98-101). One consciously inscribes these “forms” in artificial memory structures and can add to and rearrange them as the occasion suits without disrupting the natural memory and its links to common sense, knowledge, will, and understanding. Language inscription in artificial memory is entirely man-made, “artificial,” and place- rather than word-centered. It can even be individualistic, since it may involve entirely personal experiences and methods of recall. Communal artificial memory systems also exist for common or classroom use. Attributed to Simonides’ invention, these artificial memory systems have images (tokens) as well as sequences (number) and, over the centuries, assumed a variety of two- and three-dimensional models. Polonius’ admonition early in the play for Laertes to “character . . . these few precepts in thy memory” (I.iii.58-59) and Hamlet’s reference later to “th’ arithmetic of memory” suggest that images and sequence both occur in the model that Shakespeare uses. “Tables” evokes “timetables,” “multiplication tables,” “tables of content,” and a two-dimensional artificial memory structure like that which, in The Art of Memory (1966), Frances Yates finds in the Congestorium artificiose memorie (1520) of Jo-
hannes Romberch.5 Ophelia’s subsequent ability to recollect snatches of songs “locked” in her artificial memory despite her madness preserves this independence of natural and artificial memories and suggests that, in Shakespeare’s day, forms assigned to artificial memory were considered durable even in insanity.

Nor does Shakespeare use the collapse of the verba-res bond that comprises Ophelia’s state to turn her actions into “extraneous vaudeville entertainment.” Audiences have long recognized a link between the infidelities that her mad songs dwell upon and the accusations of infidelity that Hamlet makes in Act III, Scene i. He addresses her as “nymph” (an expression possibly connoting wanton as well as chaste behavior), and later he asks her if she is honest (chaste). The interview in this scene builds to his eventual dismissal of her as part of a total humanity that he sees as “arrant knaves” and hence as incapable of being faithful. Twice during the interview, he orders her to a nunnery (a convent, though, too, as probably a house of prostitution). In her madness, she sings of a lover who has rejected his lady because she has not remained pure: “Quoth she, ‘Before you tumbled me,/ You promis’d me to wed.’” He replies, “‘So would I ‘a’ done, by yonder sun,/ And thou hadst not come to my bed’” (IV.v.62-66). In Madness in Shakespearean Tragedy (1929), H. Somerville considers this “admission” a “very realistic fantasy . . . not very different from those of many young girls ‘madly’ in love” and not unusual in “states of acute mania.”6 Still, the exigencies which require Shakespeare to interweave a consistent imagery for the sake of a unified play do tend to rein in the “wildness” and “jangle” that his characters say are typical of madness and which give mimetic, though not artistic, justification to the dramatically exaggerated and unnecessary mad scenes that critics such as Louis Wright find occurring in Dekker’s The Honest Whore and Dekker and Webster’s Northward Ho (1603-06).

Shakespeare is also careful to delineate an acceptable course for the illness. Consistent with Bright’s theories, he provides a natural humor, attacks it with devastating shocks, and shows madness as the consequence of the shocks. Ophelia’s particular humor is love-melancholy. Against its dangers both her brother and her father give warning (I.iii), calling what must have been the beginnings of a natural emotion into question and examination. The questioning increases after an offstage visit by Hamlet to her closet. He frightens her with both his appearance and
behavior (II.i.74-117), and the uneasiness that the visit sets off is increased by Hamlet's vacillating actions in Scenes i and ii of Act III. More "shocks" are provided in her father's murder and "obscure funeral," Hamlet's departure from Denmark, and an inconsistent reception by the Queen, who at times "will not speak with her" (IV.v.1). An obedient daughter and sister, she is left without reliable support in a world "out of joint" and withdraws into a fantasy world where her love is a pilgrim on a pilgrimage, her father is in the grave, and she is the abandoned victim of an opportunistic lover. Sensing that what she had "will never come again" and unable to accept what is, she drowns under "uncertain" circumstances. Some scholars have questioned if Shakespeare in delineating the course of her madness needed to heap so many devastating shocks upon her, and others if indeed she "felt either passion or affection for Hamlet" since, after his passionate denunciations of Act III, Scene ii, she offers such a detached and rhetorically stiff response, and in the mad scene she never mentions him directly. Horatio and the Queen are told merely that "she speaks much of her father" and hear that "There's tricks i' th' world" (IV.v.4-5). These scholars propose Ophelia's madness as the result of fear, but whether the consequence of love-melancholy or of fear, it differs from the sudden unprepared, unpathological Senecan madness of earlier English drama.

Whereas audiences have little problem in dealing with Ophelia's insanity, they do have some doubts about accepting Hamlet's feigned illness. These doubts center in his odd behavior on occasions when it seems unlikely that he would be pretending. Early in the play, Claudius explains the oddness as Hamlet's having persevered "In obstinate condolence" to the point of "unmanly grief" following his father's death (I.ii.87-96), and indeed, the "death" does offer a "frame" on which audiences may account for certain of his actions. Critics have also seen the opening soliloquy and Hamlet's refusal to countenance the speed with which his mother takes a second husband (I.ii.129-59) as a basis of explanation. These critics explain his actions on his visit to Ophelia's closet (II.i.74-117), for example, in terms of his habit of moving mentally from particulars to generalizations and so of his having included her in the general condemnations of the opening soliloquy. The incident occurs prior to his possibly knowing of Polonius' offer to use Ophelia as an agent for Claudius and Hamlet's own admonition to get
her to a nunnery (III.i.120). Audiences and critics have also seen as evidence of odd behavior Hamlet's relish at the prospect of his effecting Claudius' damnation (III.iii.88-95), his callous response to having killed Polonius and subsequent abuse of his mother (III.iv.31-33, 91-94), the quarrel with Laertes at Ophelia's grave (V.i.266-67), and the self-satisfaction at his having sent Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths (V.ii. 57-62). There also are, subsequent to Hamlet's first meeting with the Ghost, a reference to his speech as “wild and whirling” by the purportedly “reliable” Horatio (I.v.133), and, in asking forgiveness of Laertes, Hamlet's own proclamation that not he but his madness “wonged” Laertes (V.ii.233-40).

Assuredly, this behavior is not normal even for a prince. Most agree with A. C. Bradley's assessment that “Hamlet was not far from insanity.” Melancholy, as Bright notes, “dulls” memory's receptivity and the image it stores and, to some extent, can appear like the disruption of true madness. Indeed, the proximity of Hamlet's acknowledged melancholy to insanity makes the “antic disposition” he affects credible to those about him. The melancholy accounts, too, for his lethargy in acting and for his inability to understand why he delays, and it can be used as well to explain his wit and quick discernment, prolonged deliberation, and sustained passion. What is not deeply impressed in memory may take on these qualities, especially in matters of awareness and conscious retrieval. The condition fosters doubts about what really has been impressed and ambiguities about not only one's personal but also one's moral character. Not being able to retrieve sharp impressions of good and evil, one ponders blurs, and rather than the stock hero of revenge drama with his disguised and unswerving purpose, audiences meet a self-questioning individual who in seeking to right wrong knowingly commits wrongs. Harold Jenkins argues that the ambiguities justify themselves psychologically as a cover for genuinely distraught feelings and dramatically as a source for the play's arresting question or retort. The doubts allow Hamlet “to glance at more than 'reason and sanity' can easily expound.” H. Granville-Barker finds the questions of Hamlet's reliability and actual mental state part of the play's inner vitality. He proposes that Shakespeare intended his audiences to be puzzled by Hamlet's actions and to wait expectantly in the course of the play for bits of evidence that would resolve their puzzlement.8

Comparative Drama
Even with these doubts and the complexities of Hamlet’s character, Reed uses it to develop a “model” for “pretenders to madness” in Jacobean drama. To Hamlet, he adds John Marston’s Malevole (The Malcontent, 1604) and Webster’s Flamineo (The White Devil, 1611-12) and Bosola (The Duchess of Malfi). Reed might also have mentioned Junius Brutus in Shakespeare’s own Rape of Lucrece (1594) who affects “folly” until he can topple the Tarquins (ll. 1807-20). In Chapter II of Book III of the Discorsi (1531), Machiavelli uses Brutus’ example in his praise of the wisdom of simulating folly when one is not powerful enough to oppose a prince directly, and Machiavelli’s ideas were known to have circulated in the Tudor court. All these pretenders are shown as hostile and vulnerable to the expedient, hypocritical, and often ruthless societies in which they live. Each is compelled by the moral evil which is prevalent to assume a mask of madness in order to camouflage political intentions, achieving in the disguise greater security and a better chance of effecting his will. Success depends upon the pretender’s giving the impression that he is mentally incapable of any responsible action that might threaten the political motives of his associates. His main purpose is, as Reed remarks, “to be corrosively amusing.” In contrast to his enemies, the pretender is seen as promoting good, and often he comes to be interpreted by audience and critic alike as a spokesman for the playwright’s views. His effectiveness on stage is due in part to the comic relief he provides with his engaging antics and to his biting wit which allows for dual interpretation. The audience is privy to his meaning, but his fellow actors appear to discredit the real substance of his disclosures and to dismiss them as the blunt railleries of an incompetent.

Still, in accepting Ophelia’s and Hamlet’s uses of language as indicative of Shakespeare’s sense of real and feigned madness, one also accepts the differences that are the bases of their realizations. Audiences are told that Ophelia’s language is centripetal. Words move from seemingly random allusions toward meaning or centrality, and “one thinks there might be thought.” Hamlet’s language, in contrast, is centrifugal. It appears to move away from meaning so that repeatedly one hears it called “wild” and “unframed.” Its centrifugal movement seems apt for dissembling, and critics as diverse as Wolfgang Clemen, T. S. Eliot, Reed, and C. S. Lewis have remarked on the effect. Arguing dissimulation, Clemen finds that, while Hamlet speaks
on the surface ambiguously and cloaks "his real meaning under quibbles and puns, images and parables," his images tend to "call things by their right names." Eliot sees the "repetition of phrase and pun" as "not part of a deliberate plan of dissimulation, but a form of emotional relief," and Reed cites Robert Burton and Aristotle for evidence of wit's link to melancholy. Lewis adds that audiences are interested in Hamlet's speeches not so much for description or an understanding of how or why he is where he is as for a certain spiritual region of doubt through which most people pass and anyone in Hamlet's circumstances may be expected to pass. Indeed, Lewis senses that the centrifugal nature of Hamlet's speech creates the illusion of deep character and generates the possibility of the various psychological interpretations based on sex and death as the "real" centers from which language and emotion spring. Certainly, although positing a modern, warping "censor," such psychological interpretations help to preserve the normal functioning of memory as intermediary between impression and knowledge and—most importantly for the moral stances of Hamlet—as presenter of "enlightened forms" to the intellectual powers and will.

Memory in both its natural and artificial forms appears to shape one of the major themes of the play—national and personal continuity. In society and in character, memory mediates indirectly by precept or directly by experience between words and things and past and present, providing each with intelligibility. In the play, the word "memory" occurs ten times, "remember" thirteen times, and "remembrance" and "forget" (memory's opposite) five times each. Memory is key to Claudius' opening speech ("Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death/ The memory be green") as well as to Fortinbras' eventual claim to rule ("I have some rights, of memory in this kingdom"). The failure to keep Hamlet's father in memory presents evidence for "rot" in the state of Denmark and prompts Hamlet's own disgust with his mother and distrust of his uncle even before he learns that his father has been murdered. Memory is key as well to Ophelia's promise to Polonius (I.iii.85-86) and Hamlet's pact with the Ghost, and in this second instance it involves both remembering and erasing some memories so that Hamlet may transform himself into his father's avenger. When his purpose seems "almost blunted," Hamlet is told by the Ghost not to forget (III.iv.110-11), and statements about for-
getting one's self appear elsewhere (I.ii.161, III.ii.192-95). Memory is key, likewise, in Hamlet's telling Horatio not to follow him in death but "Absent thee from felicity awhile... To tell my story" (V.ii.347-49). This last sense of remembering seems to apply also to Ophelia, who promises to lock certain precepts in her memory where they may be retrieved later (I.iii.84-85) and who in her madness seems to call for a remembrance similar to that which Hamlet seeks from Horatio. But memory is perhaps most key in "catching the conscience of a king" when, in the play-within-a-play, Hamlet uses similarities in the killing of Gonzago to evoke in Claudius' mind revealing remembrance of his crime.

The play-within-a-play affirms some of the prevailing functions of memory in Renaissance drama. The "purpose of playing," Hamlet tells the players (III.ii), is mnemonic: it is "to hold... the mirror up to nature: to show... the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." Drama accomplishes this purpose by being both similar to and different from life, by letting its "art" recall and measure "nature." Indeed, Shakespeare's contemporary, Sir Philip Sidney, makes poetry superior to history in this regard, though, as the dishonesty of the court and the presence of Osric emphasize, "art" can lose its purpose by becoming overly "unnatural." To prevent this loss, Hamlet advises the players to suit "word to the action" and give proper articulation and gesture. Being memory tokens as well as checks on "nature," words need be chosen and spoken to be understood, and actors must not detract from their message either by over-acting or by setting confusing distractions before audiences. Properly presented, tokens can by their abilities to retrieve move even an actor to tears (II.ii.519-20) and, in the case of Claudius, remind a murderer of his crimes by their likenesses to past events. The prefatory dumb-show to this play-within-a-play provides a run-through without words and, by the questions it raises on stage, suggests something of the power of language to pinpoint recall. It provides a model within the play for audience reaction to the play itself. As defined by Hamlet, the purposes of drama are little different from those that Plato attacked in his day. Being highly mimetic, drama becomes a way of reliving experiences in memory instead of analyzing and understanding them. It preserves rather than alters. Through identifications with the performance, audiences retrieve impressions from their individual storehouses and commit what they
are witnessing to future recall. Events are arranged obviously and not argumentatively, and a spell of material things or predicaments overpowers abstraction or predicables.11

II

In King Lear, the terms of mediation change. No longer does memory mediate between words and behavior. Coming from a king, Lear's language issues as commands that anticipate fulfillment and enlist human agents. Early in the play, he recognizes that at times these fulfillments will not occur (I.i.108) and that agents can wrongfully get between him and his will (I.i.121). Goneril and Regan's subsequent refusals to treat him as he expected reinforce the first recognition, and the second gains poignancy from Lear's later plea that Regan "reason not the need" of a retinue but understand that her stripping him of his men will drive him mad (II.iv.264-86). Without Kent and others to effect his wishes, he is propelled increasingly to nihilism or to relying on the gods for fulfillment or to pressuring language to be the thing itself rather than a symbol for or of. His words become as "empty" of worldly consequences and as isolating as Ophelia's, and like her he becomes a spectacle for his fellow actors and audiences with his hallucinations, snatches of song, and crown of weeds and flowers. In the mock trial of his daughters Goneril and Regan (III.vi), even the Fool and Poor Tom cannot enter fully into the fantasies. They humor him but also stand outside. The passing of thoughts with such extraordinary speed that words are left out conveys in Lear's speech the same centripetal movement that Ophelia's mad conversations do, and like her speaking "things in doubt/ That carry but half sense," his "matter and impertinency mix'd,../ Reason in madness" (IV.vi.174-75) requires that others "botch the words up fit to their own thoughts." Audiences are assisted in this "botching" by having been witness to the kingdom's division and the daughters' subsequent rebuffs which bring on the madness. They are also permitted to see in the partial correction of Lear's condition through sleep and music an added difference from Ophelia's state, though, as critics warn, one should not presume a full recovery.

Again, Shakespeare's method of delineating madness follows the manner of Bright. He provides Lear with a natural humor—once more a melancholy—attacks it with devastating shocks, and shows Lear's insanity as the consequence of these shocks.
Generally, critics feel that the point at which real illness occurs coincides with Lear's recognition of himself in Poor Tom (III. iv). However, before that time, ample evidence of growing irrationality exists and accompanies Lear's own announced and repeated fears of going mad. Certainly, one can argue the seeds of his illness in his behavior toward his daughters and Kent in the opening scene. Both the love he demands that his daughters swear as the basis for gaining their shares of the kingdom and his reaction to Cordelia's failure to promise such love suggest an instability that Kent's banishment reinforces. Still, Kent does not himself consider the King then insane (I.i.145-46). Critics tend to cite as the first shock moving Lear toward actual madness Goneril's affront and censure of his retinue. Her actions end with her expressed desire to reduce the number of Lear's men (I.iv). The second shock occurs in the next act when Lear finds Kent in stocks. This shock brings about symptoms of hysteria, and it is followed almost immediately by Regan's rejection of his wishes and decision to make his retinue even smaller than had Goneril (II.iv). That both shocks should involve attacks on Lear's means of executing his commands reinforces a link between language and madness just as in some ways the fullest restoration of his powers comes when he no longer complains to the heavens or calls curses down but kills the soldier who is hanging Cordelia (V.iii.275). In so doing, he requires no other agent, becoming himself the active force of his will.

Not that memory and remembering do not also figure in the play. Lear's abdication of power is an early withdrawal to the memory of a childlike time without kingly responsibility. Later, after the rebuffs of Goneril and Regan, he keeps recurring mentally to a time when he thought them dutiful. The Fool throughout both withdrawals reminds Lear of his foolishness in regard to having given away his powers and to having treated Cordelia as he did. The jests, as Kenneth Muir notes, "coming on top of Lear's afflictions, and concerned as they are with the afflictions, help to drive him mad."12 So, too, the major shocks that bring on the madness force not his dealing with the present but a review of his past behavior toward Cordelia. After Goneril's attack, for instance, Lear recalls that Cordelia's was a "most small fault" (I.iv.266-67), and subsequently, having remembered Regan's existence, he recalls that he did someone (Cordelia?) wrong (I.v.24), though here, as likely, he could
mean Goneril. In the midst of his anger at Regan's having put Kent in stocks, he again briefly recalls Cordelia (II.iv.212-15), and later, on the heath, he indicates that madness lies in recalling the injuries done him by Goneril and Regan (III.iv.21-22). On meeting Poor Tom, he surmises that only unkind daughters could have reduced a man to such a condition (III.iv.70-71) and refuses Kent's correction. Still later, Kent explains that memory of Lear's injustices prevents him from seeing Cordelia (IV.iii.42-47), and finally, it is to yet another memory that Lear would recur in their imprisonment. He and Cordelia will be as "birds i' th' cage," exchanging blessings and forgiveness, telling old tales as if they were God's spies (V.iii). Again, a shirking of adult responsibility seems to suggest itself. Only the shock of Cordelia's death brings Lear back to reality, and he desires then not to go on living (V.iii).13

Although the word "memory" is mentioned once, "remember" eleven times, and "forget" twice, artificial memory does not figure expressly in the play. As in Hamlet, Shakespeare does seem to suggest with Lear's songs that artificial memory withstands certain kinds of madness, but in keeping with the anticipatory nature of kingly language, the bulk of the uses of memory in the play is part of instructing or giving orders (I.i.27, I.iii.20, IV.vi.262-63). Lear's refusal at eighty himself to follow the anticipatory nature of words into purposeful possibility constitutes the play's real center. Scholars such as Reed argue his "motives move or influence the story only up to the point where he becomes utterly insane," then other wills take over. Just as in Hamlet, what is at stake in the refusal is sound judgment, worldly wisdom, and continuity—those steadfast resolutions which, as George Puttenham indicates, result from "examining and comparing the times past with the present, and, by them both considering the time to come."14 Principally, this continuity is of one's self (I.v.32-33), one's nature (IV.vi.227), and what one can recover of oneself after madness (IV.vii. 65-67, 72-74). The continuity can extend as well to one's recognition of others who have undergone changes (IV.vi.106, 136), and, as in Hamlet, it carries national implications. In Albany's victory over France and his attempts to involve Lear physically in the fruits of that victory, one can see the recall from illness and prison as little different from the retrieval of a cherished impression from memory's storehouse. The recall prevents the disruption in identity that continued discord be-
tween Britons or a victory by the French would convey. Indeed, as Leo Kirschbaum has argued, Albany's emergence from the shadow of Goneril is itself a remarkable piece of playwriting.15

Somerville has argued as well for the real "madness" of Goneril. He characterizes her as having "a type of mind in which emotion, tender or otherwise, is but feebly represented—or possibly lacking altogether." He adds that "she is neither moral or immoral. . . . She is a personality without conscience." She exhibits none of the fellowship that Enid Welsford sees as typical of the play's good characters, and Somerville notes that her insanity is not the same as Lear's or Ophelia's—or, at times, Hamlet's. Interested only in self-gratification, she betrays no mental conflict. Somerville argues that the lack of conflict comprises something like "moral insanity," and he dismisses the idea of any real love between her and Edmund. Rather, he reasons that, as with Oswald earlier, her admiration for Edmund is for an "instrument she means to use for the attainment of her ultimate object—the 'golden round.'" Somerville sees her poisoning Regan not out of jealousy but as a way of removing an impediment to the throne of all Britain, and he describes her suicide as a means of preventing her being arraigned for conspiracy to murder Albany.16 Certainly, she is a monstrous character, and there is some intelligence missing in the forms that she retrieves of good and evil, and one might compare this disjunction of memory's moral workings to Lear's verbal disjunctions which involve mainly referents and syntax. One might also argue that, in her tendency to misuse language—to make everything contingent on whim, to promise what she has no intention of fulfilling, and to abrogate her promises as soon as better possibilities arise—one has something like Ophelia's "unshaped" language. But Shakespeare nowhere acknowledges her "madness" or even her "mock madness," and one should be hesitant to introduce into the text theories of insanity that may not be applicable.

Like Hamlet, Edgar pretends madness as a way of surviving conditions that have suddenly grown life-threatening. His dissembling lies midway between the real madness that Lear undergoes and the sane dissimulation that Kent undertakes as Caius. It chooses a form—possession—which, coming from without, is different from Hamlet's supposed inner disintegration and which, except for its dissimulation, approaches the older Senecan model of theatrical insanity. The frequent shifts in his
outward persona have led critics such as Kirschbaum to argue that Edgar is more "a dramatic device" than "a mimetic unity." Taken as a function, he comes to personify "the learning through total nakedness, what man must learn to endure and feel in the mere process of survival." As Maynard Mack points out, he is a type of Morality hero—"the naïf and dupe who out of deception and harsh experience gains wisdom," and in a play set in pre-Christian Britain, he suggests anima naturaliter christiana. Again, as in Hamlet's mock madness, the direction of the language that Edgar uses is centrifugal. Words whirl outward—if not from a consistent inner point of view, from standard depictions of Bedlamite behavior and transcriptions of bogus possession in Samuel Harsnett's A Declaration of Egregious Popishe Impositions (1603). Their outward direction reinforces dissembling, and their source in Harsnett strengthens the religious themes that run through the play. These themes have much to do with generalizations about man's nature, divine justice, and the correlation of divine and human realms that correspondence in Renaissance memory theories emphasizes. Shakespeare's final sense of not imposing human limits on divine will seems to place him in a camp that is cautious about the hermeticism that, in Theatre of the World (1969), Yates associates with the design of the rebuilt Globe theater.17

Still, if Edgar is meant to be seen in relation to Kent and Lear, he is not a major character, and the centrifugal movement of his mad language cannot be quite the same as that of a character such as Hamlet. As Poor Tom, he initiates no action. Instead, he is the focus of actions initiated by his half-brother Edmund and a willing, though at times distanced, participant in Lear's fanciful rages. In these rages, he uses his nakedness and pretended fits to offset Lear's self-absorption and to open Lear to an awareness of the personal and limited nature of his own afflictions. "The worst," as Edgar will later say, "is not/So long as we can say, 'This is the worst'" (IV.i.27-28). There is nothing initiatory or cruelly manipulative in his deception. It is only after the death of Oswald that he begins really to affect the main plot with his exposures of Goneril and Edmund, and by this time he has dropped his guise of insanity. His being principally a respondent during the period of feigned madness prevents him from appearing to be Machiavellian or complex in the way that Hamlet and other pretenders to madness seem. His respondent nature also accounts for his apparent lack of
“a rich psychological unity.” To have given him coherence and suggested something of the depth of Hamlet might well have diminished the control that Lear exercises over the play. In the advertisement for the 1608 quarto of the play, there is clear evidence of Edgar’s popularity. The quarto advertises that the text contains “the unfortunate life of Edgar, sonne and heire to the Earle of Gloster, and his sullen and assumed humor of Tom of Bedlam.” This need to keep Edgar from taking over may explain Shakespeare’s relying so heavily on Harsnett and stock Bedlamite behavior. By giving audiences what they expect of a madman, he does not need to depict or deepen motivation, and in the end he does not need to involve Edgar significantly in the plot’s resolution. He can conclude the play on Albany with Edgar embodying the new order of “good” courtier, having triumphed over the “evil” Edmund and Oswald and succeeded Kent and his father in the role.

In its treatment of madness and memory, King Lear shows no marked alteration in the purposes of drama that Shakespeare enunciates in Hamlet. One has again “a mirror of nature” along “obvious” lines and calculated to enlist responses by showing “the very age and body of the times his form and pressure.” Initially the responses involve problems of retirement, mediation (including mothers “coming between” fathers and children), and Lear’s naive belief that one may give up power and still have things governed as he would have governed them. The expectations that others should think and act as an extended self is unrealistic, and a delegation of power from one to many is as likely to produce discord as harmony. Equally naive are the initial reactions that the failures of these expectations produce. Lear thinks that he is “More sinn’d against than sinning” (III.ii.60), and Gloucester that one is to gods “As flies to wanton boys. . . . They kill us for their sport” (IV.i.36-37). Gloucester’s recovery from such notions to bless Edgar and then to announce that henceforward he will “bear/ Affliction” (IV.vi) anticipates Lear’s reconciliation with Cordelia (IV.vii) and his helping her to bear the affliction of their imprisonment (V.iii). Lear’s recovery has prompted critics to speak of “reason in madness” and propose that Lear “acquires wisdom by going mad.”18 But the “sanity” of the play comes not from Lear, who dies thinking that Cordelia may yet be breathing, but from Albany and Edgar, who, having triumphed over the evil of the play, express faith in a future. While life may not be run quite

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the way one wishes, it can, nonetheless, be well-run. This sense is summed up by Edgar’s concluding speech. It pays homage to those who have gone before and affirms limited hope to Lear’s pessimism: “The oldest hath borne most; we that are young/ Shall never see so much, nor live so long.”

Of the four types of madness that Michel Foucault describes emerging in the Renaissance, Shakespeare in *Hamlet* and *King Lear* seems to forego the madnesses of “romantic identification,” “vain presumption,” and “just punishment” for that of “desperate passion.” Involved in the disappointments and deceptions of love, this “madness” persists as passion while there is still a love object. Only when the object is removed does real madness occur, either as a verbal retreat to an imaginary realm where the object may be repossessed mentally or to a death in which the lovers feel they will never again be separated. Foucault notes that this subjectivity “is Ophelia’s last song” and “the bitter and sweet madness of *King Lear.*” But, as the plays’ emphases on language suggest, Foucault’s net might have been cast wider by acknowledging the predominantly social and worldly character of love in the Renaissance, especially in that same demicosm that determines the man-made meanings of words and makes possible the proper workings of memory. As John Stevens explains love’s logic, falling in love makes one pleasing to others. If one wants to please, he must allow himself to fall and remain in love, and if he is not in love, he must pretend to be so.19 Love in both cases is objectifying, and it gains its expression through a consistent and referential worldly language (i.e., a language which communicates). In both plays, key love relationships are strained by language’s failures, and the results are isolation and a weakening of the social fabric. Eventually at risk are personal and national continuities, for it is by accurate reflection that consistency, continuity, and communal and personal direction evolve. With the dislocations and confusions that the “new science” and the various expansions of the period generated, one can understand Shakespeare’s emphases on worldly memory. Amid so many changes, memory and memory structure become beacons that prevent shipwreck and drowning in madness, incomprehensibility, and doubt.
NOTES


3 Reed, pp. 24, 44, 64-65, 72, 82. For an opposing interpretation of the mad scene in The Duchess of Malfi, see Louis Wright, "Madmen as Vaudeville Performers on the Elizabethan Stage," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 30 (1931), 48-54.


Quotations from Shakespeare's text in the following sections of this paper will be from The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).


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13 In "The Iconography of Wisdom and Folly in King Lear," Clifford Davidson provides an interesting extension of this birdcage image in his discussions of the play's world-turned-upside-down topoi; see Shakespeare and the Emblem, ed. Tibor Fabiny, Papers in English and American Studies, 3 (Szeged, 1984), pp. 189-214.

14 Reed, p. 128; Puttenham, pp. 40-41.

15 Kirschbaum, pp. 33-49. The birdcage image which Lear uses for imprisonment is used by Plato in the Theaetetus (197c-d) for memory.


18 Muir, p. lx.