The Feigned Madness of Ulysses and Hamlet: A Derridean Reading of Cartesian Cogito

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Ulysses, the towering mythological figure and the hero of the world's most famous epic *The Odyssey*, put on the pretence of madness to shirk the Trojan War. This is not mentioned in Homer, but in *Fabulae* by Gaius Julius Hyginus. Similarly, Hamlet put on an "antic disposition" after the ghost exhorted him to kill King Claudius. In these two cases taken from mythology and literature, and pertaining to the Classical period and the Elizabethan age respectively, intelligent characters put on the pretence of madness, in their battle with society though they are in control of their senses. It is the aim of this paper to examine the dynamics of reason and non-reason when combined and brought so close to one another, that they could be easily confounded, in light of Derrida's reading of Descartes' formulations about reason. Since the two examined works pertain to the Classical and Elizabethan ages respectively, the paper will shed light on the historical background of madness in these periods to give a broader perspective of reason and madness in these works.

Keywords: feigned madness, reason, Ulysses, *Hamlet*, Derrida, Descartes, Gaius Julius Hyginus, Shakespeare

Introduction to Descartes' Argument

In *Discourse on Method*, Descartes argues that he perceives his existence through his ability to think:

I resolved to pretend that everything that had ever entered my mind was as false as the figments of my dreams. But then, immediately, as I strove to think of everything as false, I realized that, in the very act of thinking everything false, I was aware of myself as something real; and observing that the truth: *I think, therefore I am*, was so firm and so assured that the most extravagant arguments of the skeptics were incapable of shaking it, I concluded that I might have no scruple in taking it as that first principle of philosophy for which I was looking for. (1637/1960a, p. 61)

According to Descartes, one could be in doubt about one's existence, one could entertain the feeling that one is mad or deceived about one's existence, but one's skepticism, one's ability to doubt, means one is thinking, and this particular evidence cannot be disregarded. In fact, if one is in doubt about one's existence, one's existence is confirmed through one's doubt, through one's ability to reason and think: "I think, therefore I am", and this happens to be the meaning of the term *cogito*, the fact that human existence is based on thinking and awareness.

Descartes was to further explore the philosophical tenets, which he introduced in *Discourse on Method*, in *Meditations*. Again he doubts all the knowledge which he perceives through his senses, since it could be deceptive. He relates a particular event, which he is seemingly so certain about; the fact that he is sitting next to the fireplace, wearing a dressing gown and holding a paper in his hand. He is so certain of the situation that he

cannot deny it as this would cast him with the madmen who are not in control of their senses.

So much is clear, and yet I must remember that I am a man who sleeps at night, and suffers in his dreams the same experiences as these madmen suffer awake, or sometimes others less reasonable than theirs. How often has it happened to me to dream at night that I was here, in this place, dressed and seated by the fire, when all the time I was lying naked in my bed. At the moment, certainly, it does not seem to be with the eye of sleep that I am looking at this paper; the head I move is not sunk in slumber; and it is with design and deliberation that I stretch out my hand and feel it. Surely what happens in a dream is not as distinct as all this? But then I remember how often in the past I have been deceived in my sleep by similar illusions, and when I reflect upon the matter more closely, I see so clearly that there are no conclusive signs by which to distinguish between our waking and our sleeping moments, that I am dumbfounded, and my confusion is such that I can almost believe myself asleep at this moment. (Descartes, 1641/1960b, pp. 102-103)

This Cartesian argument is quite ambivalent and confounding for despite the fact that Descartes is considered one of the major philosophers of rationalism, as he propounded that knowledge is to be attained through reason and deduction, unlike the empiricists who perceived the world through their senses, his words seem to doubt even reason itself. In the above argument, Descartes says that he cannot deny that he is sitting next to the fireplace as he can fully perceive this experience with his senses. He, however, finds that when he sleeps, his senses are deluded by his dreams and that he is visited by the strangest of fantasies, ones that are madder than those experienced by the so-called madmen, which leaves him extremely confounded.

Derrida's Reading of Cartesian Reason

According to Foucault, Descartes' proposition that humans derive their existence from their ability to think (the *cogito*) was a turning point in western philosophy as it marked the separation of madness from reason. He finds Descartes' proposition to be quite symptomatic of the fissure that took place in the classical age between madness and reason. If Descartes believes that he is not mad because he can think, then reason and madness are clearly set apart, with reason reigning and madness subsiding. Thus, the Cartesian formula of doubt, according to Foucault, becomes "the great exorcism of madness" (1961/1988, p. 108).

In "Cogito and the History of Madness",¹ Derrida takes Foucault to task for taking Descartes' *Meditations* to mean that madness is "dismissed, excluded, and ostracized from the circle of philosophical dignity" (1963/2001a, p. 37). Derrida finds that Descartes' *cogito* is "much less adverse to and accusatory of madness" than Foucault seems to think (1963/2001a, p. 39). He even goes as far as to hint that in applying structuralism to his understanding of the *cogito*, Foucault almost turns into a totalitarian (1963/2001a, pp. 69-70). What he clearly means is that thinking of the classical age in terms of a structure that functions according to a certain set of rules and trying to excavate those rules, as was customary with Foucault's archaeological project, is likely to yield a narrow and totalitarian view of that age, which is no less totalitarian than the classical age itself. Being the post-structuralist he is, it would be easy to understand why Derrida attacks Foucault's archaeology of madness, which is structuralist in essence. While Structuralism seeks to find a binding structure with a fixed centre, post-structuralism seeks to decentralize structures and emphasize fluidity and play instead. In fact, this happens to be the bottom line of Derrida's seminal essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", which has become the manifesto of deconstruction. What a structure with a fixed centre

¹ This paper was first delivered by Derrida at the *Collège Philosophique* in 1963. It was published in 1963 in the fourth issue of *Revue de Métaphysique et de morale*. Derrida then added a number of notes and republished it in the following issue of the journal in 1964. It then appeared in his book *L'écriture et la différence* in 1967, which was translated into English under the title of *Writing and Difference* by Alan Bass in 1978. The 2001 edition of the latter is the one used in this research.

offers is stability, order and reassurance, but what Derrida seeks to uncover is the play of the structure, a play which is likely to happen because the very foundation of this structure is language, which by definition is elusive; “language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique” (Derrida, 1967/2001b, p. 358).

Derrida, thus, believes that there was no abrupt division between madness and non-madness in the classical period. In fact, in “Cogito and the History of Madness” he disapproves of this attempt for “to write the history of the decision, division, difference runs the risk of construing the division as an event or a structure subsequent to the unity of an original presence, thereby confirming metaphysics in its fundamental operation” (1963/2001a, p. 48). What Derrida would propose instead would be to examine the language of a given text by looking for play and fluidity, instead of a structure or centre, the result of which is to find both madness and non-madness in the very same discourse: “Language being the break with madness, it adheres more thoroughly to its essence and vocation” (1963/2001a, p. 66). Derrida, thus, finds that the more language seeks to break free from madness, the closer it gets to it, for the dividing lines between binary opposites are rather transparent and diaphanous.

He takes the argument to another level, when he addresses the part of the debate related to dreams. He finds that in Descartes’ *Meditations*, dreams and madness are similar in many ways as both are illusory and mentally confounding:

In effect, if I am asleep, everything I perceive while dreaming may be, as Descartes says, “false and illusory,” particularly the existence of my hands and my body and the actions of opening my eyes, moving my head, etc. In other words, what was previously excluded, according to Foucault, as insanity, is admissible within dreams. And we will see why in a moment. But, says Descartes, let us suppose that all my oneirical representations are illusory. Even in this case, there must be some representations of things as naturally certain as the body, hands, etc., however illusory this representation may be, and however false its relation to that which it represents. Now, within these representations, these images, these ideas in the Cartesian sense, everything may be fictitious and false, as in the representations of those painters whose imaginations, as Descartes expressly says, are “extravagant” enough to invent something so new that its like has never been seen before. (Derrida, 1963/2001a, p. 58)

Madness and dreams are shown to share a great deal in common, for both playfully misplace natural components so that we end up with “false and illusory” impressions, something which they share with the paintings of “extravagant” painters, whose imagination topples all the settled conventions of perception. Derrida takes it a step further when he argues that dreams make the so-called normal man madder than the madman himself for madness only affects “certain areas of sensory perception, and in a contingent and partial way” (Derrida, 1963/2001a, p. 61), whereas in sleep all sensory perception becomes deluded, which leaves Derrida with the conclusion that “the dreamer, is madder than the madman” (1963/2001a, p. 61).

Thus, the general purport of Derrida’s argument aims at eliminating the dividing lines between reason and non-reason, leaving us with fluidity and instability instead, for the rationality of the normal man is contested as he is now seen to be madder than the mad, even if this happens on an oneiric level. Examined from Derrida’s deconstructionist perspective, all concepts and entities are shown to flow into one another, hence revealing Descartes’ concept of the cogito in a new light, for the dividing line between it and insanity becomes no longer existent.

The aim of this research is not to examine works about madness or turning mad, but to examine the feigned madness of intelligent and wily characters. The reason is that feigned madness is a rare instance in which a sane person initiates himself into a phase of madness, hence evoking both sanity and insanity at the

same time. This particular case, in which both sanity and insanity come so close to one another, invokes a number of questions: Do sanity and madness co-exist or does the existence of one rule out the other? Does the feigner fall prey to madness and succumb to it in the course of his pretence or does he remain fully aware of the game he has engaged himself in? Does the feigner find that there are sharp dividing lines between sanity and insanity?

The following, then, will be an attempt at answering these questions through examining the theme of feigned madness in *Ulysses* by Gaius Julius Hyginus and *Hamlet* by Shakespeare in light of Derrida's understanding of Cartesian reason.

The Feigned Madness of Ulysses

Ulysses, has come to be known in history as one of the most intelligent Greeks, in fact, had it not been for him, the Greeks would not have won the Trojan War which lasted for ten whole years. It was Ulysses who came up with the idea of building a huge wooden horse and presenting it as a war trophy to the Trojans. On seeing the horse, the Trojans thought that the Greeks had given up and dragged it into their fortified city, which the Greeks had not been able to penetrate for ten years. The bait was swallowed by the Trojans; at night, the Greek soldiers sneaked out of the horse and opened the gates of the city to their fellow soldiers, thus conquering Troy, the invincible city whose walls were said to be built by the gods Poseidon and Apollo. Interestingly, the war was not won by the physical strength of Achilles, Agamemnon, or Menelaus but by the wit of Ulysses. No wonder he was the favourite mortal of Athena, the goddess of wisdom, for whom else would she choose for her bestows and favours.

On his way back home, he was punished by Poseidon for showing excessive pride. His hubris had to be tempered. The god struck hard and Ulysses had to spend another ten years at sea before he finally arrived at Ithaca, his homeland, to reunite with his wife and son. On his odyssey, his journey of pain and suffering, he managed to overcome most of the hardships by recourse to his wit and intelligence.

Interestingly, this highly witty character feigned madness to evade the summons of the Trojan War, for no Greek in his right mind could dare shirk his duty towards his country. Though there is no mention of that in Homer's *The Odyssey*, for according to Aristotle, Homer, "of surpassing merit" omitted all the unnecessary and disconnected events, such as his wound at Parnassus or his feigned madness, to create a unified plot (Aristotle, 2011, p. 13), the myth is related by the Latin author Gaius Julius Hyginus (64 B.C.-A.D. 17) in his collection of myths *Fabulae*.

Ulysses was warned by an oracle that if he went to the war, he would spend twenty years away from home. To look mad and deceive all the others,

...he put on a cap, pretending madness, and yoked a horse and an ox to the plow. Palamedes felt he was pretending when he saw this, and taking his son Telemachus from the cradle, put him in front of the plow with the words: "Give up your pretence and come and join the allies." Then Ulysses promised that he would come; from that time he was hostile to Palamedes. (Hyginus, n.d., XCV)

Thus, in order to look mad, all Ulysses had to do was to activate the behavior of madmen within himself; he put on a cap and yoked two unmatching yoke mates, a horse and an ox, which proves that the logic of madness, to use a rather oxymoronic term, was dormant in him, and all he had to do was to initiate it; madness constitutes a part of our existence, a part which we choose to suppress and which we could easily activate.

It is worthwhile to delve deeper into the theme of madness in its Classical context. The Greeks knew that madness was always at the gate. This can be easily detected in both their mythology and literature.

As far as mythology is concerned, the cult of Dionysus, the god of wine, fertility and husbandry would be a case in point. It was observed by women priestesses known as maenads or bacchantes, who were known for their dark frenzied Bacchic rituals. In reenacting the passion of Dionysus, they could lose control over their senses and indulge in violent rites. Instead of chopping animals in the open wilderness, they could go into a frenzy and tear animals (sometimes even humans), eat the animals' raw and drink their blood. The fact that they were women, and bearing in mind the low status women were accorded in ancient Greece, particularly during the golden period, closely links unreason, madness, and frenzy with womanhood and associates reason, logic and order with men. Interestingly, Dionysus was conceived of as an effeminate god, with an ivy wreath on his head, an image which is quite in keeping with his entourage of women. His retinue also included Satyrs and Pans, who were known for their excessive sexuality and lechery.

On the one hand, Dionysus is the god of fertility, hence that of life, fruitfulness and regeneration, and also the god of wine, which alleviates human cares and worries. On the other hand, he is also the god of chaos, and anarchy, for wine could unleash the primordial and untamed desires of humans. Dionysus' double nature is a reflection of human nature, for the Greek gods were anthropomorphic as they were created in a human image. In other words, underneath the surface of order, restraint, and reason, madness lurks. One need only scratch the surface to unleash one's hidden primordial nature.

Like mythology, Classical literature dealt with this theme frequently. For instance, in *Bacchae* by Euripides, the story of Dionysus is tackled at due length. Dionysus goes to Thebes to wreak revenge on his mother's sisters who refused to believe that Zeus had impregnated her and to punish Pentheus, now the ruler of Thebes, as he refuses to acknowledge him as a god. In retaliation, he works his mother's sisters "in frenzy; their wits all crazed" (Euripides, 405 B.C./1997, p. 2). Wearing his wild attire of fawn skins, he and his entourage start practising the inebriate Bacchic rites, tearing heifers, calves, and goats asunder and drinking their blood. Commenting on those rites, Pentheus finds them to be "mad wickedness" (Euripides, 405 B.C./1997, p. 9), and "folly" (Euripides, 405 B.C./1997, p. 13).

In *The Eumendies*, by Aeschylus, the raging Furies, who are outraged by the murder of Clytemnestra at the hands of her own son Orestes, hound Orestes and disturb the peace and quiet of the Athenian polis. They are old matriarchal deities, but Apollo, the god of light, prophecy, truth, and knowledge, who belongs to the new Olympian order, despises them,

They disgust me.
These grey, ancient children never touched
By god, man or beast- the eternal virgins.
Born for destruction only, the dark pit,
They range the bowels of Earth, the world of death,
Loathed by men and the gods who hold Olympus. (Aeschylus, 458 B.C./1979a, p. 234)

Athena, the goddess of wisdom, manages to contain their anger and to turn them into the "Eumendies", or the "kindly ones". In giving up their former identity and their dark matriarchal powers, they become the new lawful subjects of order and reason. Athena herself, who happens to be a woman, owes allegiance to the supremacy of law and patriarchal rule, for she was not born from the womb of a woman, but emerged from the head of Zeus. Apollo reminds the audience that Athena, "Child sprung full-blown from Olympian Zeus, / Never

bred in the darkness of the womb/ But such a stock no goddess could conceive!” (Euripides, 405 B.C./1997, p. 261).

As such, Aeschylus seems to present a rite of passage, a journey of growth and maturation, from the old, violent, matriarchal, and primal chaos to a new, civilized, rational, and patriarchal order. However, Athena invites the Furies to be part of the new order, which indicates they are not totally dismissed. It is true that the madness of the Furies is contained and their dark subversive powers and frenzied rites are tempered, which is a clear instance of reason trying to curb its binary opposite and foil: madness, yet they still remain part of the city, for Athena does not want to anger the older deities.

All the above examples demonstrate how madness had to be curbed so that reason would reign. This, however, did not rule out the fact that madness was always felt to be quite imminent. It was also often associated with women, and the effeminate Dionysus, since with the rise of patriarchy, reason became the domain of men.

The way soothsaying was viewed in antiquity also reveals a great deal about madness. Visionaries or prophets were often accused of madness. In *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus, Cassandra, the priestess of Apollo and King Priam’s daughter, could foresee the horrendous murder that was going to be committed by Clytemnestra in the house of Argos, but no one listened to her warnings. She knew that no one would believe her, for Apollo, the god of light and prophecy, who initially endowed her with that gift, was to curse her for rejecting his advances by making none believe her prophecies. The leader of the chorus tells her: “We’d heard your fame as a seer, / But no one looks for seers in Argos” (Aeschylus, 458 B.C./1979b, p. 146). Later, he describes her words as “riddles” (p. 147).

Similarly, In *King Oedipus* by Sophocles, Teiresias, the blind seer, who was summoned by Oedipus to help him uncover the reason behind the plague that was ravaging Thebes, is readily accused of “madness” and is angrily dismissed by Oedipus, when he discloses the fact that Oedipus is the “cursed polluter” of the land (Sophocles, 429 B.C./1975, p. 35).

In these two instances, prophecy, the ability to foresee the future, which exceeds normal human potentials, is at first ill-received and often associated with madness, since ordinary people cannot grapple with the far-sightedness of the seer, and when they finally come to understand his words, it is usually too late. Thus, in *Agamemnon*, on entering the house to meet her fate at the hands of Clytemnestra, Cassandra tells the chorus: “Believe me if you will. What will it matter/ If you won’t? It comes when it comes,/ And soon you’ll see it face to face/ And say the seer was all too true” (Aeschylus, 458 B.C./1979b, p. 153).

Thus prophecy, which is a divine gift, for it comes from Apollo, is often associated with madness, which shows how the Greeks thought that madness could be a sign of overt intelligence, since it exceeds the abilities of normal mortals.

All the above instances prove that Classical literature tackled the theme of madness abundantly and prove that the Greeks were quite aware of the fact that madness was so close. It is true that they preferred reason, especially with the foundation of the polis or city-state, which was an urbanized space based on logic and order, yet madness was always at the door. It could come back in the form of the older matriarchal deities, or Dionysus’ revelries and dances in the wilderness. More shockingly, it could come back as the sound of wisdom through the words of seers or soothsayers, who would mistakenly be considered mad at first. Derrida’s reading of Cartesian reason would make a great deal of sense when it comes to this Classical approach to madness, for

in those Classical texts, madness and reason are brought so close to one another that the reader is made to feel its threat and dominance, even with those attempts at controlling and curbing it.

To go back to the example of Ulysses, it becomes clear that such a wily character is capable of functioning according to the dictates of both madness and reason at the same time. All he needs to do is to pull the strings of either. He acts like a madman, but when his son is placed before him, he reverts to reason and activates its mechanism and stops the plow. He might not have totally succumbed to its dictates, but he found its dictates in his inner self, and allowed them to surface, even for a while. This is not much different from the Cartesian example of a normal person who entertains the most fantastic dreams, that he becomes madder than the madman in his dreams. To say that Ulysses was only feigning madness and was aware of that all the time, would be too categorical and limiting in Derrida's view, for the sheer fact that Ulysses acts mad is proof enough that madness lurks in one's deep recesses. When his son was placed before his eyes, he woke up from that dream of madness, just as when the dreamer wakes up and parts with his dream.

Hamlet's "Antic Disposition"

Hamlet was a well-learned scholar, who went to the renowned University of Wittenberg. He was known for his eager wit, intellectual abilities, and natural disposition to ask questions. He was also given to philosophising, which is obvious in many of his speeches such as the famous speech "To be or not to be...", and the speech which he delivers in the graveyard while holding Yorick's skull. Despite his high mental and intellectual abilities, he decided to feign madness after being visited by his father's ghost on the battlements of the castle of Elsinore. Bewildered by the nature of the ghost, whether it was "a spirit of health or goblin damned" (Shakespeare, 1603/1988, 1. 4. 40), he deliberately decided to "put an antic disposition on" (1. 5. 181) to find out whether his uncle was the murderer or not.

Nevertheless, the nature of Hamlet's madness becomes quite controversial especially when read in light of Derrida's argument. Is his madness feigned or does he really slip into insanity at times? And is there a clear dividing line between his sanity and insanity?

Hamlet chooses to feign madness for a particular purpose, which is to find out whether the king is the real murderer or not. The fact that he declares his intention to act mad could be taken as concrete proof that he feigns madness willingly and does not turn mad. A number of utterances and acts confirm this view. Hamlet tells his best friend Horatio after seeing the ghost that he will "put an antic disposition on" (1. 5. 181). Later, he immediately realizes that his former friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were sent for and did not come of their own accord, telling them "You were sent for; and there is a kind of confession in your looks, which your/modesties have not craft enough to colour" (2. 2. 279-281). These instances prove that he was in control of his senses, despite feigning madness. He also arranges with a troupe of actors to play out the *Murder of Gonzago*, before the king and queen, and asks Horatio to keep an eye on the king, to gauge his reaction. The choice of the play is quite remarkable, for it is a reenactment of the death of the old king. It is a mousetrap and this also proves that he is in control of his senses. Another instance which confirms that he is not mad is when he tells his mother in the closet scene: "I essentially am not in madness,/But mad in craft" (3. 4. 194-195). He also perceptively realizes that his friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern would "marshall him to knavery" (3. 4. 212) and that is why he tampers with the letter they bore to the king of England.

It is worth mentioning at this point that Shakespeare borrowed his idea for Hamlet from the tale "Amleth" that was recounted by a Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus in the twelfth century. In the Danish story, Amleth's

father, a noble Dane, was killed by his brother Fengi who claimed his property for himself and married his wife Gerutha. In what follows, Amleth also feigns madness to disguise his plans for revenge. It becomes evident that even the original text on which Shakespeare based his story was about the feigned rather than the real insanity of prince Amleth.

Interestingly, Ophelia does go mad in the course of the play after Hamlet's rejection of her and her father's murder by her lover, and finally drowns herself. Ophelia's madness can be easily seen as a foil to Hamlet's madness, for in no part of the play after she goes mad do we see her reverting to reason, unlike Hamlet who moves in and out of madness all the time, which could be seen as proof that Hamlet's madness is feigned while Ophelia's madness is genuine.

In the same vein, Crawford argues that Hamlet's madness is feigned, unlike that of King Lear:

There need be no doubt, then, that Hamlet's madness was really feigned. He saw much to be gained by it, and to this end he did many things that the persons of the drama must construe as madness. His avowed intention was to throw them off the track. To understand the madness as real is to make of the play a mad-house tragedy that could have no meaning for the very sane Englishmen for whom Shakespeare wrote. There is dramatic value in such madness as Lear's, for the play traces the causes of his madness, and the influences that restore him. Lear's madness had its roots in his moral and spiritual defects, and the cure was his moral regeneration. But no such dramatic value can be assigned to Hamlet's madness. (1916)

All the above proves that Hamlet's madness was feigned, especially that he himself clearly declared that he was going to feign madness, yet there remains a number of other factors which could have easily driven him mad, or at least made him verge on the borders of madness. There is no denying that he had been exposed to a series of traumas which rendered him psychologically unstable and vulnerable, that it becomes difficult at times to know for sure whether or not he actually slipped into madness. First, he lost his father, second, his mother, who seemed quite devastated and "all tears" (1. 2. 149) when his father passed away, rushed into marriage with "most wicked speed" (1. 2. 156). Third, not only did she hastily marry, but she defiled herself in "incestuous sheets" (1. 2. 157). Fourth, he was summoned to his father's ghost, who bid him kill his uncle. These mishaps that befell him one after the other did surely weigh him down. To him, the world was "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable" (1. 2. 133).

The characters of the play themselves are divided over whether he is mad or feigning madness so much so that each character has "a theory of madness to apply to Hamlet" (Thiher, 1999, p. 82).

First there are those who think he has turned mad. Polonius, for instance, thinks that Hamlet has turned mad because of his unrequited love for Ophelia; his is "the theory of eros as madness that might well appeal to fathers with daughters" (Thiher, 1999, p. 82). After he spies on him with King Claudius, he is reassured of the validity of his theory and confirms that "the origin and commencement of his grief/Sprung from neglected love" (3. 1. 180-181), for he formerly instructed his daughter to reject his advances. Similarly, Ophelia believes he has turned insane, saying that his mind was "overthrown" (3. 1. 153) and "blasted with ecstasy" (3. 1. 163), which means that his mind has been destroyed by madness. Even Hamlet's mother comes to believe he has turned mad; when he sees the ghost in her closet, she screams: "Alas, he's mad" (3. 4. 109), and tells him that the ghost is "the very coinage of [his] brain" (3. 4. 143). Later, when she meets with Claudius she tells him that Hamlet is "mad as the sea and wind, when both contend/which is the mightier" (4. 1. 7-8). Rosencrantz seems to be baffled by Hamlet's utterances as well. When Hamlet takes him for a sponge, he tells him: "I understand you not, my lord" (4. 2. 23).

Claudius, on the other hand, like Palamedes in Ulysses' case, remains skeptical of Hamlet's sudden lunacy. He definitely has his reasons for doubting Hamlet's madness, for he feels threatened by the sheer presence of a rightful heir to the throne. Claudius is also pretty cunning and is not to be taken in by appearances. It is for this

very reason that he invites Hamlet's former friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern from Wittenberg to find out the reason why Hamlet is acting weirdly, and wants them to "get from him why he puts on this confusion" (3. 1. 2), which points to his doubts about Hamlet's madness for "puts on" means that he knows that his madness is feigned and not genuine. Additionally, he and Polonius secretly spy on a meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia to gauge if his madness is feigned or genuine. After Hamlet's encounter with Ophelia, Claudius comes to the conclusion that though what he spoke was a little incoherent, it "was not like madness". He senses danger and plans to send Hamlet hastily to England, where he arranges for him to be killed. Like Claudius, Guildenstern also believes it to be "crafty madness" (3. 1. 8).

The characters of the play are not the only ones divided over Hamlet's lunacy; "Hamlet himself equivocates" (Thiher, 1999, p. 83); his utterances oscillate between confirming madness and denying it. For instance, he tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that his "wit is diseased" (3. 2. 320-321), but perhaps that is because he knows that they are spying on him. Later he reassures his mother in the closet scene that he is only feigning madness. Towards the end of the play, in the fencing scene, Hamlet asks forgiveness of Laertes and blames his distracted mind and madness for all that had come to pass:

Give me your pardon, sir I've done you wrong; / But pardon't, as you are a gentleman. / This presence knows, / And you must needs have heard, how I am punished / With sore distraction. What I have done, / That might your nature honour, and exception / Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness. (5. 2. 224-230).

In short, despite the initial intention of Hamlet to act mad, his lunatic actions, equivocal utterances, and the divided reactions of the characters towards his newly adopted attitude, create confusion and leave the audience in doubt about the nature of his madness.

More importantly, Hamlet saw the ghost of his father in his mother's closet, while she did not see it, which could also be proof that he did slip into insanity. It is worth noting that the first time he saw the ghost was different from the second time, since in the first time, he saw it with other witnesses, while the second time he saw the ghost in the closet scene, he was the only one to see it, which could be seen as proof that he lost control over his senses and started hallucinating.

Interestingly, like Ulysses, Hamlet managed to mimic the gestures and looks of madmen; it seems they were dormant within him, and all he needed to do was to simply activate madness from within. Hamlet's inroad into madness was quite easy, for he could easily gravitate towards it, and then move away from it when there was need for it; he easily fluctuated between the two states. Could Hamlet's state be an embodiment of Derrida's concept of the fluidity between juxtaposing states? John Decarlo finds that Hamlet could be said to restore "the pristine state of the Cogito, in which a determined reason and a determined madness co-exist, both separated and yet integrated" (2011, p. 59). Similarly, Thiher argues that "[m]adness can display reason, and it can even suggest richer meanings than mere sanity. Or at least interpretation finds in madness new meanings, as well as a rhetoric that competes for credibility with the rhetoric of rationality" (1999, pp. 82-83). He explains this in light of Polonius' confusion at Hamlet's mad utterances, which seem to be quite deep and meaningful at times, and quotes Polonius' own words to prove this point: "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. 208-211). Polonius' words do confirm the fact that in his madness, Hamlet seemed capable of rational thinking, in fact his utterances were far better than those delivered by those who possessed reason and sanity. In his madness, he seemed to surpass the rationale of sane men. Interestingly, Claudius says: "Madness in great ones must not unwatched go" (3. 1. 191-192), which is

another remarkable utterance on the nature of madness since it shows that great ones are prone to madness, in fact his words make it seem as if it were a common occurrence in great men. His words also mean that their madness is more dangerous than that of ordinary men, as their psyches become the battlefield of two extremities: high intellect versus madness, for in their madness, they also get visitations of extremely wise revelations.

Historically, the word Hamlet is the English equivalent of the Danish word “Amleth” which means imbecile or simpleton. As has been mentioned earlier, Shakespeare borrowed his story for Hamlet from the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus’ account of the noble fool Amleth, which was recounted in his twelfth century chronicles of Denmark, *Gesta Danorum*. Hilda Ellis Davidson notes that the oldest source of Hamlet, which happens to be the Danish Saxo Grammaticus’ tale of Amleth, depicts Hamlet as a trickster just as the Norse god Loki of evil and mischief (1979, pp. 6-7), who is playful and wily, and who is willing to twist societal codes as his main concern is preserving his own well-being. Thus, anthropologically speaking, playful foolery stems from a long-standing tradition in Scandinavian culture and mythology, since one of their main ancient deities was a playful god, who at times used the guise of foolery to achieve certain goals. Interestingly, this motif seeped into contemporary Danish art as well. *The Idiots* (1998), a film by the contemporary Danish director Lars von Trier, would be a case in point, as the film is about a group of Danish middle-class semi-intellectuals who decide to pretend they are fools in public spaces to evade social mores and norms, which could be seen as a throwback to this tradition of using foolery to accomplish a certain mission or attain certain ends.

Another important point is that Shakespeare used the figure of the fool in many of his plays. On the surface, the fool seems to serve one purpose; he evokes laughter with his actions and words but there is more to him than that; “the laughter which he arouses is at the same time a profound criticism of the forces which have made him what he is. The counterpart in his exaggerated non-involvement of the society of which he is a part, he is yet in his profound self-awareness and in his pity for those who suffer, its one hope of salvation” (Ellis, 1968, p. 245). This is particularly true of Shakespeare’s fools, many of whom are wise fools, such as the fools of *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, and *King Lear*.

Thus, the tradition of the fool does not only have Scandinavian roots but is a recurrent motif in Shakespearean drama itself. In both cases the dividing line between reason and non-reason disappears, for the existence of one does not rule out the other. Thus, Danish and Shakespearean fools could be seen as manifestations of this admixture of reason and non-reason.

Interestingly, “the ship of fools” is another important metaphor for the relationship between madness and society in the middle ages. The fools would be put on board of a ship, which would hit the sea. The fool passengers would be seen when their ship would dock every now and then at different ports. Thus, though the fools were sent away to the sea, they were not totally wiped out of sight and mind, but were kept “at the point of passage” (Foucault, 1961/1988, p. 11), as they would often come back to the shores of memory.

Historical and mythological manifestations of foolery such as the Danish and Shakespearean fools, the god Loki and the ship of fools all provide historical and mythological background to the theme of madness as presented by Shakespeare in *Hamlet*, which was set in the late medieval period in Denmark, and prove that madness existed vis-à-vis reason, and as such “the wise fool... [becomes] the deepest aspect of Hamlet’s character” (Hunt, 2007, p. 112).

Conclusion

As has been mentioned earlier, Derrida, the post-structuralist, finds that in his *Meditations*, Descartes confounds dreams with visitations of madness and replaces one with the other. As such, any human being turns mad, even if temporarily, when he dreams. Viewed in light of this Derridean interpretation of Descartes' cogito, madness is seen to be an essential part of our existence; thus, in imitating madmen, Ulysses and Hamlet were only stressing an already existent part of their nature. They found it lurking in their deep recesses, and all they had to do was to activate it, since madness already constituted a part of their being, albeit a silenced and hushed up one. They were like sleepers succumbing to a mad and extravagant dream, or artists receiving inspiration and illumination.

In addition, read in light of Derrida's understanding of Cartesian cogito, the feigned madness of Ulysses and Hamlet becomes clear proof that there are no dividing lines between reason and madness, and that the two states can easily merge into one another. In fact, they are no longer to be regarded as two separate entities, but are to be seen as adjacent mental states, with no borders so much so that it becomes so easy to move back and forth smoothly. Madness and sanity, with all the shades in between, including feigned madness, constitute our being, and the existence of one, does not rule out the existence of the other. Historically speaking, the texts pertain to periods in which madmen were not locked up in asylums or stigmatized. Madness was recognized as a different form of existence, but there were no such attempts at completely silencing it. It existed on the periphery, but could easily jump to the forefront every now and then.

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