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Displays of Anger and Doubling

In Hamlet Prince of Denmark

Anger is prevalent throughout Hamlet. It is an emotion that is continually present, from the first to the last scene. This paper will focus on Hamlet's reaction to his own anger, as well as the manner in which he deals with this anger. The primary reasons for his anger with the main characters will be outlined and consideration will be given to contemporary Renaissance views regarding how an individual should deal with anger. The doubling that occurs in Hamlet's mind between Gertrude and Ophelia and Laertes and himself will be explored, and a discussion of corporeal images and the affect of intangible language on the tangible body will conclude the paper.

I. Review of Hamlet's Anger

Anger is one of the defining characteristics of Hamlet's relationship with virtually all of the main characters in the play. It proves to be the force which drives many of Hamlet's actions, and it is manifested in nearly all of his relationships. He struggles to achieve a balance between his passion and reason, and his inability to achieve this proves agonizing for him.

Perhaps the most overt example of Hamlet's anger is illustrated in his relationship with Ophelia. The depth of his anger toward her will be considered later, but his anger is clear from the first exchange between them in the first scene of act three. Hamlet admits to Ophelia that he did love her at one time, only to rescind his confession four lines later with, "I loved you not" (3.1.119). Ophelia and Laertes discuss Hamlet and the "trifling of his favor" (1.2.5), and Laertes cautions her that it is a temporary affection:

Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,

The perfume and suppliance of a minute,

No more (1.3.8-10).

The reader hears of their first confrontation from Ophelia, in her account to Polonius. She claims that Hamlet treated her roughly and acted in a strange manner. Ophelia admits to her father that prior to Hamlet's rough treatment, he had: "made many tenders of his affection" (1.3.98) to her. The only emotion that the reader actually witnesses Hamlet display toward Ophelia is hostility. Until her death, when Hamlet grapples with Laertes, we do not see anything tender in him where Ophelia is concerned.

He is angry with her mainly because he feels that she has betrayed him. She returns his tokens of affection in act 3 scene 1, but more seriously she acquiesces to her father by allowing him and Claudius to listen in on their conversation. He is infuriated by this betrayal because he associates this act of disloyalty with the one his mother instigated against his father.

Hamlet's relationship with Claudius is enigmatic because although he has the most overt reason to be angry with him, out of all the characters, he does not express this anger. The ghost of Hamlet senior reveals to him early in the play, that Claudius is responsible for his death. He maintains: "That serpent that did sting thy father's life/Now wears his crown" (1.5.39-40). The ghost encourages Hamlet to take action to correct the situation as best as he can. He implores Hamlet:

If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not.

Let not the royal bed of Denmark be

A couch for luxury and damned incest (1.5.81-83).

He makes no qualms about which member of the couple he wants Hamlet to make suffer when he instructs Hamlet:

But howsomever thou pursues this act,

Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive

Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven (1.5.84-86).

Hamlet clearly feels a great deal of anger toward Claudius. But while the anger is present as is the desire to seek revenge on Claudius in order to avenge his father, he is unable to express this anger. He represses it throughout most of the play because he is unable to act on his emotions. In act 3 scene 3 he comes close to taking action, yet he refrains from doing so because Claudius is praying. He cannot bring himself to kill Claudius up to this point, yet he refuses to take action against him unless the result is painful enough for Claudius.

To kill Claudius while he is confessing his sins, according to the religious belief at the time, would be to insure that he would be admitted to heaven. When Hamlet first sees him praying, he resolves to kill him, but on further consideration, he concludes that it would be too merciful:

Now might I do it pat, now' a is a-praying,

And now I'll do't. And so' a goes to heaven,

And so am I revenged. That would be scanned.

A villain kills my father, and for that

I, his sole son, do this same villain send

To heaven.

Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge" (3.3.73-79).

Hamlet is angry with Gertrude, unlike Claudius, for several reasons. He is unhappy with her at the opening of the play for entering into an incestuous relationship with Claudius so soon after her husband's death. His anger is exacerbated by the realization that Claudius is the murderer. There may also be some doubt in Hamlet's mind as to when the relationship between Gertrude and Claudius began. The ghost of Hamlet senior, in his appearance to Hamlet, refers to Claudius as "that incestuous, that adulterate beast" (1.5.42).

At the heart of this anger is the feeling of betrayal. He feels that she has betrayed his father by marrying his murderer, and he also feels that she has betrayed his family and country as well by her actions. Her betrayal has, for Hamlet, permanently altered Denmark. When the ghost reveals to him what has taken place, Hamlet comments;

My tables-meet it as I set it down

That one may smile and smile, and be a villain.

At least I am sure that it may be so in Denmark
(1.5.107-109).

Denmark is now a place where evil deeds are committed and the guilty go unpunished. Gertrude's betrayal of family and country lies at the heart of Hamlet's anger, and his inability to express it causes him to displace his anger onto other characters such as Ophelia, and in a different manner, Laertes.

Hamlet's first display of anger toward Laertes occurs at

the scene of Ophelia's burial, when Hamlet discovers Laertes mourning her death. He becomes enraged and declares: "Why, I will fight with him on this theme/Until my eyelids will no longer wag" (5.1.253-254). When Gertrude questions what theme he is speaking of, Hamlet replies that he is referring to their love for Ophelia, specifically that he loved her more.

There is also evidence that Hamlet envies Laertes because he is immediately able to seek revenge for his father's murder without agonizing over his situation. When Hamlet is arguing with him in Ophelia's grave, he makes a point of observing this distinction between himself and Laertes:

I prithee take thy fingers from my throat,
For, though I am not splenitive and rash,
Yet have I in me something dangerous,
Which let thy wisdom fear. Hold off thy hand (5.1.246-249).

It is not surprising that a man who has been urged by the ghost of his father to seek revenge, yet cannot take action, would be rather disturbed by a man who undertakes revenge without a second thought, and who lacks the added motivation of a visit from beyond the grave by his father. It is reasonable to assume that this accounts for a great deal of the anger that Hamlet feels toward Laertes.

When Hamlet marvels over the fact that his mother, who was once so devoted to her father, is now doting on the new king, he exclaims, "But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue" (1.2.159). This exclamation illustrates how difficult

it is for him to repress his anger and frustration at the events taking place in Elsinore. However, unlike the other characters in the play, Hamlet is able to express a significant amount of anger. He must largely repress his emotions toward Claudius and Gertrude, but he can openly display anger toward Laertes and Ophelia. With Gertrude, he represses his anger until the closet scene, and he refrains from raging against Claudius, for fear that he will damage his plans for revenge. However, he is able to release his anger in other ways, such as by rewriting the script of the play for the traveling thespians to take on the suspiciously familiar subject matter of a villain pouring poison into the ear of the king and then romancing the king's widow.

The other characters are not given the opportunity to express whatever anger they may feel toward Hamlet. For some this is merely frustrating, while for others, it proves to have devastating effects. Until the closet scene, Gertrude does not know why Hamlet is so angry with her. She never expresses anger toward him, and it is difficult to tell whether or not she is ever truly angry. She considers Hamlet's eccentric behavior at first to be the result of his excessive mourning of his father's death, and she seems convinced by Polonius that he is mad for Ophelia's love.

Ophelia is constantly subjected to Hamlet's abuses, yet she never retaliates, and often does not even attempt to defend herself against his slanderous remarks. However, his abuses do have a negative effect on her:

Our interpretation of her [Ophelia's] role in the play should reflect that she was the destined bride of a man who grew to be first vulgar, then cruel, and finally phobic about about female sexuality (Erlich 153).

Without delving into Hamlet's phobias, it is clear that he changes a great deal toward her. He is no longer the man who was writing her love poems; he now insults and intimidates her at any given opportunity.

This change in attitude and action proves to have a devastating impact on Ophelia. Her treatment by Hamlet, coupled with the murder of her father, results in her madness. As Maurice Charney explains: "Madness is the most obvious expression of passion in Shakespeare, a disordered passion that breaks the narrow bounds of reason and civilized constraints" (Charney 35). Ophelia cannot rant and rave, demanding to know what is the cause for the sudden change in his treatment of her. Charney concludes that it is "madness on the Elizabethan stage that releases the emotional and imaginative powers that the saner women in the play are required to suppress" (Charney 47).

Gertrude and Ophelia respond quite differently to Hamlet's rages against them. Both Ophelia and Gertrude first appear in the play as rather docile and passive women. As a result of Hamlet's expressions of anger toward them, their personalities are greatly altered. Gertrude seems content in her relationship with Claudius in the beginning of the play, but she is horrified by Hamlet's revelation to her in the closet scene. She implores

him:

O, speak to me no more.

These words like daggers enter in mine ears.

No more, sweet Hamlet (3.4.96-98).

She must now bear the burden of worrying about the deed she has committed by marrying Claudius, and about the sanity of her son. Gertrude must also witness the deterioration of Ophelia's sanity and live with the realization that Ophelia is dead because of her madness which was brought about largely by Hamlet's cruelty to Ophelia and his murder of her father.

Gertrude, at Ophelia's burial, remarks sadly:

I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife.

I thought thy bride-bed to have decked, sweet maid,

And not have strewed thy grave (5.1.230-232).

Ophelia, conversely, may have started out as a pliant woman, but her madness makes her powerful.

Madness enables her to assert herself and express depths of feeling previously unknown.

By tragic convention she need no longer be the silent woman, an inexpressive listener like Horatio. Everyone is suddenly starting

to worry about her and her secret power

(Charney 46-47). Ophelia, who bore the brunt of Hamlet's anger for much of the play, is now free. She is prancing around with flowers in her hair singing inappropriate songs. It is her turn to elicit concern instead of being the concerned one.

Those around her must struggle to comprehend what has happened

to her rather than her trying to come to grips with Hamlet's sudden and cruel treatment of her.

Claudius and Laertes must also suppress their anger toward Hamlet. Claudius is suspicious of Hamlet, and he attempts to have him killed by sending him to England. He does not ever rage against him. It is obvious, however, that Hamlet's attempts to seek revenge do have an effect on him. After Claudius sees the play which depicts a murder similar to the one he committed against Hamlet senior, he nears the breaking point. He darts from his seat, noticeably disturbed, and shouts, "Give me some light. Away!" (3.2.253) He is extremely upset by this, yet he never confronts Hamlet, because doing so might expose his guilt in the murder of Hamlet senior. He cannot even keep Gertrude from drinking the poisoned cup meant for Hamlet, because doing so would be an admission of guilt.

Even Laertes, who is a characteristically rash individual, must delay his plan for revenge. He bursts upon the castle in a rage, yet Claudius convinces him to suppress his anger so that he can properly take revenge against Hamlet. Claudius urges:

Be you content to lend your patience to us,
And we shall jointly labor with your soul
To give it due content (4.5.207-209).

Hamlet, although he tends to view himself as a victim forced into an undesirable situation, has a certain amount of freedom that is provided by his ability to rage against those around him. His anger is a tool used to mask his knowledge of the

truth behind his father's murder, but it is also a means for him to release the frustration he feels by being betrayed and by not being able to commit himself to seek vengeance on Claudius or confront his mother. Yet this anger that Hamlet so frequently displays, as powerful a tool as it might be for him, in the end just leaves him feeling more frustrated. Although it may temporarily cloud his reason, Hamlet is a man who cannot hide behind passion; the reason in his personality will emerge, and trying to ignore it just proves frustrating for him.

II. The Historical Context of Anger

It is clear that Hamlet is grappling with an intense anger toward most of the characters in the play, and it is significant to consider what views on dealing with anger were held by contemporaries of Shakespeare. Hamlet and Laertes display two alternative methods of dealing with anger and the act of revenge, but which was deemed the most suitable course of action in the sixteenth century?

Aristotle's Rhetoric contains this explanation of anger:

Anger, then, may be defined as an appetite,
attended with pain, for revenge, on account
of an apparent slighting of things which
concern one, or of oneself or of one's friends,
when such slighting is unmeet. (Hoeniger 312).

During the Elizabethan period, a decidedly fresh approach to medicine and science was being taken. However, this new way of thinking was slow to evolve, and the Renaissance physician still relied a great deal on the beliefs of the past, reaching as far back as such ancient philosophers as Plato, Aristotle, Galen, and Aquinas. The Renaissance scientist or physician still retained a profound respect for established authority, and relied mainly on the work done by the ancient philosophers or medieval thinkers who based their work on the ancients, rather than by observing human nature for themselves (Babb 1).

One medical text that remained with the contemporaries of Shakespeare was Aquinas's De passionibus animae, which

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outlines the major passions of the body and attempts to explain their relationship to one another and the manner in which they affect the body. Passions were referred to during the Renaissance as perturbations, affections, or passions:

When they are spoken of as passions, it was obviously because they were regarded as opposed to actions, for in actions man acted upon external things: in passions man was acted upon by external things (Campbell 69).

The passions can be categorized as Concupiscible and Irascible. These are pairs of contrary passions. The Irascible passions, for example, are hope and despair, fear and daring, and anger. Anger has no alternative passion because it desires revenge. There were two commonly held beliefs regarding how revenge could be dealt with. It could either be fulfilled, which would result in happiness, or if it was not resolved it would be painfully frustrating (Hoeniger 162). Hamlet provides a good example of a person who is seized by the passion of anger. He is not able to fulfill the revenge he desires, and as a result, for much of the play, he is frustrated to the point of near madness.

Campbell maintains that Hamlet is not a naturally melancholic person, but instead he is sanguine by nature, the type who are characteristically gay and gracious, and affable in speech (Campbell 112). However, because of his father's revelation to him, coupled with Hamlet's inability to fulfill his revenge, Hamlet becomes melancholic. Grief is characteristic of the melancholic personality. "If the angry person remains

frustrated, he will tend to brood on revenge and appear much like a melancholic" (Hoeniger 170). This is precisely what happens to Hamlet. As he grieves over his father's death, he becomes consumed with the passion of grief, and this grief has a great negative effect on him:

In Hamlet himself it is passion which is not
moderated by reason...Hamlet's grief is,
therefore, the grief that makes memory fade,
that makes reason fail in directing the will,
that makes him guilty of sloth (Campbell 144).

Campbell is quick to add that Hamlet is capable of an anger powerful enough to demand revenge. Claudius' and Gertrude's warnings to Hamlet to stop his grieving take on a new tone when considered in relation to the contemporary views of grief during Shakespeare's time. The king urges Hamlet to curb his excessive grief:

To do obsequious sorrow
is a course
Of unpious stubbornness; 't is unmanly grief:
It shows a will most incorrect to heaven;
A heart unfortified, a mind impatient;
An understanding simple and unschool'd (1.2.92-97).

Elizabethans did not regard grief in the sentimental way that is characteristic of the twentieth century. Their view was one passed down from both medieval times and from classical philosophy, and they were very aware of its dangerous possibilities:

Shakespeare did not fail to see and to show the essential humanness of grief in its passionate refusal of the consolations of philosophy.

Neither did he fail to show the destruction which followed Hamlet's slothfulness in executing what his reason had judged and commanded him to do. Nor did he fail to show the destruction that came from his passionate and rash action when he acted from passion and not from reason (Campbell 145).

In Shakespeare's day anger was regarded as an exceedingly dangerous and destructive passion which ought to be curbed on a daily basis. Anger was thought to cause mania or melancholy, both of which Hamlet displays at various points in the play (Hoeniger 162). Extreme anger was often associated with madness. Penelope Doob explains that this idea comes out of medieval thinking, and that extreme or habitual anger was also considered to be sinful:

When yielding to anger, we commit a sin, for we are obeying the promptings of a dangerous passion of a lower part of our nature instead of the divine gift of reason. Passion overthrows reason and madness results (Doob 29).

The act of revenge was also considered at this time to be sinful. In The French Academie, Peter de la Primaudaye Esquire, who was writing at the close of the sixteenth century, insists that God administers justice to the world. He punishes

sin either directly or indirectly through the appointed magistrates. If a man is not punished for sin physically, he will suffer mentally, through a troubled mind. Private revenge, therefore, is the attempt to take into private hands God's vengeance. Such an attempt springs from passions and can only result in disaster (Campbell 19).

Hamlet is concerned that he is taking too much time to fulfill his revenge on Claudius because he lacks the passion necessary to perform the act of revenge. When his father appears to him, Hamlet asks the ghost,

Do you not come your tardy son to chide,
That, laps'd in time and passion, lets go by
The important acting of your dread command? (3.4.107-

109)

However, it is not passion that he lacks. He has both passion and reason, which should be enough to motivate him to perform the act of revenge. In act 4 Hamlet actually lists his reasons for revenge: "Sith I have cause and will and strength and means/To do't" (4.4.45,46). He then realizes that he has the reason and passion to commit the act: "Excitements of my reason and my blood" (4.4.58). Why then, does he delay in his acting of revenge? He would be able to release his anger, rather than run the risk of having it remain unfulfilled and lead to horrible frustration. Campbell offers this explanation for the delay:

His is not the case where reason stays passion,
but where momentary passion absorbs him to the
exclusion of all else. He acts quickly at the

command of passion or not at all. The one command which he seems to have accepted as reasonable and right, he has not acted upon.

But he has been brutal with Ophelia and cruel with his mother, and he has killed Polonius under the stress of passion (Campbell 138-139).

Understanding contemporary views in Shakespeare's time helps to shed light on the dilemma that Hamlet faced. For Hamlet to refuse or even to delay seeking revenge on Claudius would result in frustration for him. It would also have meant that he was refusing to help avenge his father. However, if he were to act on the revenge, he would be taking God's duty into his own hands, and he would risk committing a serious sin.

III Hamlet's Doubling of Gertrude with Ophelia and Himself with Laertes

A large part of Hamlet's time and energy is devoted to masking his anger over his father's murder and his mother's expedient marriage to Claudius. He refrains from expressing his anger toward Claudius in order to protect his plans for revenge against the king. Hamlet feels angry and bitterly disappointed with Gertrude, yet until the third scene of act four, he does not allow these feelings to surface.

During the first half of the play he remains docile and obedient toward her. When she urges him to remain in Elsinore rather than return to school, he replies, "I shall in all my best obey you, madam" (1.2.21). He is immediately praised by Claudius for his "loving and fair reply," and he goes on to comment: "This gentle and unforced accord of Hamlet/Sits smiling to my heart" (1.2.23-24). However, we are made aware in this same scene how he views his mother's marriage when in a soliloquy he exclaims:

Within a month,
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married. O, most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not nor it cannot come to any good.
But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue" (1.2, 153-159).

He does manage to "hold his tongue" regarding his opinion of his mother's remarriage; he does not confront her until the closet scene. However, despite all his attempts at concealment he fails to restrain an overt and bitter anger toward Ophelia.

His verbal abuse of Ophelia can be viewed as a displacement of the anger that Hamlet feels toward his mother and his disappointment in her. The degree to which he is truly angry with Ophelia is subject to speculation because of Hamlet's feigned madness throughout the play and the possibility of his actual madness. If Hamlet is considered to be mad, his angry encounters with Ophelia could be regarded as a blurring in his mind of Gertrude and Ophelia. No longer capable of clearly distinguishing between the two, he sees a composite woman in Ophelia, rather than his mother and his lover. She would then come to represent for Hamlet the quintessential woman, in that she will do what Hamlet believes all women must do: betray their husbands.

Prior to his father's murder, Hamlet had been wooing Ophelia and he admits to her, "I did love you once" (3.1.115). However, his behavior toward her changes rapidly after the murder. Polonius attempts to convince Claudius and Gertrude that Hamlet is mad for the love of Ophelia, yet Hamlet speaks harshly to her, questioning her chastity on several occasions and giving her the command, "Get thee to a nunnery" (3.1.121). His harsh words cause Ophelia to comment as she returns his love tokens, "Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind" (3.1.101).

This line is significant in that it foreshadows Hamlet's

earlier statement, "I must be cruel only to be kind" (3.1.101). Here he is referring to his mother and the cruel words he used to convince her of the travesty she has committed, but it is a crucial link to the connection in Hamlet's mind between Gertrude and Ophelia. He is angry with his mother for committing what he considers to be incest by marrying her brother-in-law, and his anger is inflamed by the scant two month mourning period in between his father's funeral and his mother's marriage. He also feels betrayed by his mother because by marrying her husband's murderer, she is condoning the murder, if not becoming an accomplice to it. This could explain why he accuses her of killing the king (3.4.30).

It is not until the final scene of the third act that he confronts his mother. After this point he has no further contact with Ophelia because he no longer needs to transfer the anger he feels for his mother onto her. In the second act he is hostile and accusatory with Ophelia. In scene one Hamlet stares at Ophelia and shakes her, for no apparent reason. As Ophelia recalls: "He raised a sigh so pitious and profound/As it did seem to shatter all his bulk/And end his being" (11.1.94-96). He continues this rage against Ophelia through the third act, the final attack occurring at the play by the traveling thespians, where he lets no opportunity pass him by to berate Ophelia by making crude comments about "country matters" and commenting on her chastity.

In this scene, it seems as if Ophelia can say nothing without causing Hamlet to manipulate the dialogue to the theme

of a woman's lack of chastity or false love. Such manipulation occurs when Ophelia agrees with Hamlet that the prologue of the play is unusually short. Ophelia comments, "'Tis brief, my lord," only to have Hamlet counter with, "As woman's love" (3.2.144,145). When taken in the context of the play they are viewing, Hamlet's ambiguous statement can be taken as directed toward Ophelia's return of Hamlet's love tokens, as she no doubt interprets it, or as an attack on the queen's marriage. What seems more likely is that he has both of them in mind, and because all of his anger up to this point has been directed toward Ophelia, she is the bearer of his latest attack.

When Hamlet concludes that a woman's love is brief, he is lumping all women into the same category to which he believes Gertrude and Ophelia belong. Arthur Davis offers this explanation for Hamlet's quickness to generalize:

A man bitterly disappointed in love is quick to think all women false. Or a man who discovers falsity in a trusted friend will easily think the whole world untrustworthy. Right or wrong, he will think and speak far beyond the bounds of his own experience because the intensity of his own pain is more powerfully convincing than years of calculated observation would be (Davis 15).

Hamlet views Gertrude and Ophelia as a composite; they are one in the same because they are both women, and it is their nature to betray the men in their lives. He rants and raves at Ophelia not because of what she has done, but because of who she is.

He sees what the result of a woman's lack of faithfulness has been for his father, and Hamlet may have determined that he will not permit Ophelia to do the same thing to him that Gertrude did to the senior Hamlet.

Hamlet has witnessed his mother's conduct in matters of love, and this has "put him quite out of love with love and poisoned his whole imagination" (Wilson 193). When he exclaims, "Frailty thy name is woman!" he is overtly referring to his mother's association with Claudius, but there is a deeper sense, especially looking back on that soliloquy after the play, that he has Ophelia in mind as well. Similarly, his fierce condemnations and commands in the nunnery scene, though aimed at Ophelia, could easily be directed toward Gertrude (Wilson 193). He is furious with Gertrude in the closet scene for annihilating his ability to love a woman, and he blames her for:

such an act

That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
From the fair forehead of an innocent love
And sets a bitter blister there (Wilson 193).

As the action of the play progresses, Hamlet becomes furious with Ophelia, and although he does not confront his mother until the closet scene, it is obvious that his anger toward her has been building steadily the entire time. Part of the cause of his anger may lie in the fact that Hamlet is an idealist. As the above passage demonstrates, he has very definite ideas about what love should be like. It hurt him so deeply to discover

his mother's infidelity to his father not just because of the incestuous relationship that was behind the infidelity, but because Gertrude and the senior Hamlet are his parents, and they should live up to the idealized pure and virtuous love that he has envisioned for them. When Gertrude betrayed his father, she also betrayed Hamlet by shattering his image of marital love. However, the blame for Hamlet's disillusionment in love cannot entirely be laid on Gertrude. As an idealist, Hamlet was bound to discover sooner or later that the world was not as he had imagined it to be. As Davis points out: "The man who believes the world perfect as it is is in for sore disappointment sooner or later, and is in danger of turning cynical or afraid or both" (15). Cynicism and fear come to characterize Hamlet's attitudes toward love, especially in his dealings with Ophelia. Because he cannot separate his mother's actions from Ophelia's actions, he cannot free himself from the fear that Ophelia will betray him just as his mother betrayed his father:

I have heard of your paintings well enough. God hath
given you one face and you make yourself another.
You jig and amble, and you lisp, you nickname God's
creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance.
Go to, I'll no more on't, it hath made me mad
(3.1.141-148).

Up to this point, Hamlet's blurring of Ophelia and Gertrude has been considered from the perspective that it is an unconscious confusion of the two women, or at least one that

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he cannot readily control. Another possibility is that Hamlet is purposely blurring Gertrude and Ophelia. He does this to aid his attempt at feigning madness in order to conceal his plan to kill Claudius. As discussed earlier, Hamlet has emotions, most notably an intense anger, that he must express, but that could considerably hinder the success of his revenge. He cannot go on a tirade against Claudius, because this would reveal his knowledge of the senior Hamlet's true cause of death. Likewise, he cannot berate his mother for her lack of chastity, as this would result in the same uncovering of his plan. He cannot even safely risk being a nuisance to his mother or uncle because in doing so he would risk being sent away, and this too could foil his revenge.

This is not to suggest that Hamlet always follows what he knows to be the safest and most reasonable course. Deciding on the best way to carry out a plan, and being able to control his emotions sufficiently in order to do so are two very different things for Hamlet, and he has difficulty reconciling the two. He is only human, and although he would like to execute his plan in a rational and unemotional manner, he finds himself in a constant struggle to control his anger. If he succeeds in harnessing it, he can use it as a valuable tool in carrying out his revenge; he will be able to murder Claudius with little or no remorse and avenge his father. If he is unsuccessful, he risks having his plan discovered or having to live with the knowledge that he cannot carry out the act his father came back from the grave to request of him.

2

With these ideas in mind, Hamlet's anger toward Ophelia and his blurring of the sins of Gertrude with Ophelia can be viewed as Hamlet's conscious decision to channel his anger toward his mother into Ophelia. It is another case of Hamlet's attempting to win control over his anger not by stifling it, but by displacing it. Peter Mercer describes the twofold agenda of Hamlet's feigned madness: "So, as always, the performance of madness is used to combine a crafty silence about the thing that really matters with a covert expression of the passion it arouses" (205). This would be a fairly simple decision for Hamlet to make because in the first act of the play Polonius has already ^{attempted to} convince Claudius and Gertrude that Hamlet's madness is caused by love of Ophelia. Hamlet would only have to encourage suspicions that are already present in the minds of these people.

Hamlet may choose to feign madness for her love because he does, in fact, love Ophelia at the opening of the play. He cannot bring her into the mess that his family has now become, so displaying anger toward her serves two purposes: he is able to throw off suspicion for his real plan, while at the same time free Ophelia from the fate that his cynicism has led him to believe awaits all women--betrayal of their husbands. When Ophelia returns his love tokens, Hamlet becomes defensive and hides his true emotions with a biting attack on Ophelia, and as Mercer maintains, "Even if he does not suspect that she reports to the king, it is an essential precaution. She must be kept away from his dangerous secret" (204). Mercer also

points out that when Ophelia returns Hamlet's love tokens, she provides him with the perfect opportunity to show anger: "It is not the reason but the excuse for a necessary disentanglement" (204).

As noted before, Hamlet's accusations and angry outbursts aimed at Ophelia end with the second scene of Act 3, and after this point he has no further contact with her. Curiously, the major confrontation between Hamlet and his mother occurs only two scenes later. The fact that he expresses anger toward them separately could indicate that he cannot distinguish between them, but there is also another possibility. Once he is able to confront the true source of his anger, his mother's betrayal and incestuous relationship with Claudius, he no longer needs to transfer his anger onto Ophelia. Act 3 scene 2 marks a turning point for Hamlet because here he is able to dispel any doubts he formerly had regarding the guilt of his uncle. When Claudius leaps out of his seat and exclaims, "Give me some light. Away!" Hamlet has incontestable proof that his father's ghost spoke the truth.

Perhaps he delayed confronting his mother because he feared that revealing Claudius' act of murder, if she was not already cognizant of what he had done, would destroy her. If he could not bear to be the one to make her realize the horrible deed she had committed by entering into an incestuous relationship with her husband's murderer, then Ophelia would have been the logical recipient of his displaced anger. Where his mother was beyond help, having already committed the deed, Ophelia

was not yet married, and so she could be averted from falling into the pattern of betraying her husband. Thus when Hamlet exclaims:

I say, we will have no more marriages: those that are married already,--all but one,--shall live; the rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go
(3.1.148-150).

he is trying to save her from her fate. Not marrying would be the safest way to keep her from doing what Gertrude has already done.

Davis notes that Hamlet's command to Ophelia demonstrates, among other things, his self-centeredness:

He is too concerned with himself in the first place... ever to do much thinking of the bettering of others. Even when he generalizes he is speaking of himself or things that affect himself. He makes sweeping statements because his own pain is so intense and so horribly real (Davis 15).

It is this self-centeredness coupled with his idealized version of the world that cause him to nearly thwart his plan for revenge. When he is finally able to stop displacing his anger onto Ophelia and confront Gertrude directly, he wants very much to make her realize what she has done to the family and to Denmark by associating herself with Claudius. Hamlet fails to consider what effect his words might have on her or what he hopes to achieve by making her aware of what she has done. He knows that she has already committed the act of incest and

that nothing can undo this, yet he presses on. His impassioned speech causes her great pain, and she must almost beg in order to make him stop (Davis 189);

O Hamlet, speak no more.

Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul,

And there I see such black and grained spots

As will not leave their tinct (3.4.89-92).

The ghost finds it necessary to make another appearance to Hamlet to ensure that he strays no further from his plan for revenge: "Do not forget: this visitation/Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose" (3.4.111-112). Yet Hamlet initially assumes his visit is to chide him for taking so much time to kill Claudius. It does not even occur to him that he has gone astray with Gertrude and Ophelia. He has become so distracted with the theme of wifely betrayal that he has allowed himself to put off the matter of killing Claudius. It is not that he has forgotten what he must do, but that he fears that doing it will lead to a consequence that he cannot bear; it will put him in an unsavory relationship with his mother.

Joel Fineman suggests that when Claudius murdered the senior Hamlet, he took his place, and in doing so, Claudius raised Hamlet to his former place. As Fineman explains, "For the characters in the play, as for the audience that perceives them, Hamlet becomes Claudius' brother when Claudius becomes Hamlet's father" (Fineman 149). If Hamlet were to murder Claudius, he would then be raised up to the position of king, and in turn to the husband of Gertrude. He cannot allow this to happen,

because it would result in his being involved in an incestuous relationship similar to the one he has been condemning so emotionally throughout the play.

Hamlet also associates himself very closely with Laertes. There are a number of similarities between the lives of the two men. They are both wealthy, have attended school abroad, and are the only sons of fathers they seem close to. They are similar in age and both love Ophelia. They experience the deaths of their fathers and attempt to seek revenge for the deaths. However, the differences between the two men end when they deal with this revenge. It takes Hamlet nearly the entire play to rouse himself into action against Claudius. He is paralyzed by indecision for the majority of the play. Laertes, on the contrary, rushes into the castle, ready to do battle with Claudius because he suspects the king is responsible for Polonius' murder. There is no agonizing moral deliberation on Laertes' part; he springs into action and never looks back. This differs greatly from Hamlet's handling of his father's murder, even with the ghost of Hamlet senior spurring him on.

The relationship between these two characters is puzzling because while they appear to be leading almost parallel lives, they deal so differently with similar situations. There is a great deal of anger between the two characters, and while the source of Laertes' anger toward Hamlet is obvious, the fury that Hamlet unleashes on Laertes is considerably more ambiguous. When Hamlet returns to Elsinore and discovers that Ophelia is dead, he becomes incensed at the sight of Laertes' grieving for

her. Hamlet physically accosts him, and challenges Laertes' love for her, exclaiming, "Forty thousand brothers/ Could not with all their quantity of love/Make up my sum" (5.1.256-258). He then demands to know what Laertes would do for her, asking if he would among other things, fast, drink vinegar, or eat a crocodile.

It is difficult to comprehend why Hamlet should be so furious with Laertes, who is grieving for his own sister. The king and queen dismiss Hamlet's behavior as the ravings of a madman, but doubling offers an explanation. As Ralph Berry explains, "Hamlet, with his supreme self-awareness, constantly sees in others images of himself: Laertes and Fortinbras are only the most obvious examples" (Berry 204).

Hamlet all but admits the doubling in his apology to Horatio;

But I am very sorry, good Horatio,
That to Laertes I forgot myself,
For by the image of my cause I see
The portraiture of his. I'll court his favors,
But, sure, the bravery of his grief did put me
Into a tow'ring passion (5.2.75-80).

Hamlet is envious of Laertes because of his ability to act without dwelling on the consequences or pondering the moral implications. Hamlet's first attempt at action has a grizzly outcome; he kills Polonius. Peter Mercer has this to say regarding Hamlet's murder of Polonius in act 3 scene 4:

Hamlet may come to his mother to speak daggers,
but immediately the killing of Polonius offers

an ironic comment on what happens when he uses one. It is his first explosion into action and it is a mistake; he hardly knows what he has done (Mercer 217).

If Hamlet does not explicitly see Laertes as his double, he at least views him as a projection of himself. Laertes is the part of Hamlet who will not allow anger to control him, but who will instead take control of his emotions and of his duties. These are two things that Hamlet has the most trouble with, and that Laertes seems able to handle with little difficulty. Hamlet is not aware of Claudius' manipulation of Laertes in act 4 scene 7 when Claudius convinces Laertes to postpone his revenge. Claudius assures Laertes:

I will work him
To an exploit, now ripe in my device,
Under the which he shall not choose but fall;
But even his mother shall uncharge the practice,
And call it an accident (4.7.62-67).

If Hamlet does view Laertes as a projection of himself, then Laertes' love for Ophelia becomes exceedingly dangerous for Hamlet. If Laertes and Hamlet are one in the same, at least in Hamlet's mind, then Hamlet's love for Ophelia becomes incestuous, and incestuous love between a brother and a sister is what Hamlet has been condemning throughout the play. Hamlet would like to believe that Laertes does not love Ophelia because it is an attempt to negate his own incestuous love for her. Hamlet has not had to grapple with this problem in the past

because up until now he has never had to confront his double, Laertes, with love for the same woman.

At various points in the play, both Hamlet and Laertes display passion that is not restrained by reason. Laertes does this by rushing into the castle to seek revenge for the murder of his father, and Hamlet does this when he rashly murders Polonius and when he grieves excessively for his father and will not allow himself to be consoled. As Campbell remarks about Hamlet: "His grief has made him sluggish, and he has allowed swift passion to seize him" (Campbell 147). Hamlet is controlled to a greater extent by reason than is Laertes, yet Hamlet mirrors Laertes when Hamlet allows passion to gain control over him at the price of reason. Hamlet may wish for passion to overcome his reason, but what he fails to understand is the great lesson of tragedy: "Those who balance passion by reason are not Fortune's puppets" (Campbell 147).

Hamlet's doubling of himself with Laertes and Ophelia with Gertrude are signs of the toll that the anger is taking on him. His anger blurs his reason, yet it does not help him to accomplish anything; it only succeeds in frustrating him further. Two major breakthroughs in Hamlet's releasing of his anger occur when he confronts the two doubles, Gertrude and Laertes. By confronting Gertrude, he is finally able to release some of his own disgust and worry over the situation by transferring it to Gertrude. In the beginning of the duel, when Hamlet asks for Laertes' forgiveness, he is able to release his anger toward him. The irony behind this is that Hamlet took so many pains

to use this anger as a mask for concealing his true emotions,
and then he must devote so much time to attempting to rid himself
of this anger.

IV Corporeal Images in Hamlet and the Body Politic

Up to this point, Hamlet's anger has been discussed in relation to how it affects him personally, as well as the characters around him. The audience is able to perceive his fury and frustration so vividly because of the manner in which Shakespeare presents these emotions through the text of the play. He uses the words in the text as a tool to make the emotion come alive and touch the audience.

Shakespeare conveys the anger that Hamlet feels and the effect that this anger has on Hamlet through corporeal images as well as by illustrating the effect that words can have on the physical body through the text. Shakespeare pairs the abstraction of language with the physical nature of the body throughout the play. The primary image that he uses to convey this is the ear, a logical choice because the ear is the receptacle of words. It is the physical link between intangible language and the tangible body. The text particularly concentrates on the detrimental effect that words can have on the body.

The ghost is the first, and arguably the most vivid example of this tool. He bridges the gap between words and the body with the lines:

But that I am forbid
To tell the secrets of my prison house,
I could a tale unfold whose lighted word

Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
And each particular hair to stand on end (1.5.13-19).

The story that he relates to Hamlet regarding his murder alters Hamlet significantly for the rest of the play. The senior Hamlet was murdered when poison was poured into his ear. The physical harm that the poison reeked on the senior Hamlet parallels the poisoning of Hamlet's mind that occurs when the ghost relates the story to him. Hamlet's life is permanently altered by this news. When the ghost appears to Hamlet, Hamlet says, "Speak, I am bound to hear," and to this the ghost answers, "So art thou to revenge when thou shalt hear." His words bind Hamlet to a course of action that he feels forced to follow. Hamlet must now avenge the death of his father by killing Claudius.

Now that the ghost's words have infected Hamlet, he is permanently altered. His opinions of his family as well as his view of his country have been changed by this single revelation. The ghost entreats him:

List, list, O, list!

Now, Hamlet, hear.

'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,
A serpent stung me. So the whole ear of Denmark
Is by a forged process of my death
Rankly abused (2.2.34-36).

22

Once Hamlet learns what has happened in Denmark, he can no longer live peacefully there. He tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, "Denmark's a prison" (2.2.241). When Guildenstern remarks, "Then the world is one," Hamlet insists that Denmark is among the worst prisons in the world.

Hamlet uses words to prove that Claudius is guilty of his father's murder when he rewrites the play to be performed by the traveling thespians in act 3. Hamlet comments on his plan by saying, "For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak/With most miraculous organ" (2.2.579-580). He tells the players, "Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue" (3.2.1-2). He talks of splitting the ears of the groundlings and cautions them to "Suit the action to the word, the word to the action" (16). He makes a substantial case for using words properly and details the power of speech. Earlier in the play he expresses his indignation at being controlled by language with the lines: "[I] Must like a whore unpack my heart with words/And fall acursing like a very drab" (2.2.571-572).

In the scene of Hamlet's confrontation with Gertrude, Polonius is hidden in order to be "in the ear of all their conference" (3.1.184-185), and Hamlet vows to himself, "I will speak daggers to her but use none./My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites" (3.2.381-3823). When he compares Claudius to "a mildewed ear/Blasting his brother," Gertrude can no longer bear it, and she entreats Hamlet "O speak to me no more./These words like daggers enter in mine ears" (3.4.94-95).

Hamlet finds an outlet for his anger through words in all of these instances. He restrains from the physical, using words instead to show his anger and disappointment toward Gertrude and to prove to himself that Claudius is the murderer, as well as to torment Claudius. What Hamlet cannot bring himself to do physically, murder Claudius for example, he does verbally, by accusing him of the murder. Yet even with his biting words, he is not direct. He must use the thespians to implicate Claudius, and prior to the closet scene, he uses Ophelia as an outlet for the angry words he cannot speak to Gertrude. This method of dealing with anger proves insufficient for Hamlet, and while it relieves some of his frustration, it fails to prove a lasting solution to his problems.

The anger that Hamlet feels, especially for Claudius, stems from the fact that Claudius is responsible for the death of his father. In addition to this, Hamlet is dealing with the murder of a king, which to him in a very literal way, is the murder of all of Denmark because of the theory of the body politic. The idea behind the body politic is that the king actually has two bodies, which Ernst Kantorowicz describes as "His own plus a superbody equivalent to the corporate life of his nation" (Hunt 28).

Hunt asserts that in Shakespeare's time, the body politic went beyond being a social metaphor, to the point where it "describes a tightly integrated world where reality stems palpably from the centers of political and religious authority" (28). Francis Barker has gone on to assert that many corporeal

images found in Hamlet and other plays of the period "were not the 'dead metaphors' that they are now, but 'indices of a social order in which the body has a central and irreducible place'" (Hunt 28).

It is no coincidence that after the senior Hamlet was murdered by having poison poured into his ear, he tells Hamlet that the whole ear of Denmark has been rankly abused. To kill the king was in effect to kill the entire country. Not only would this deepen Hamlet's anger toward and hatred of Claudius, but it would also introduce a new dimension of his anger toward Gertrude and Ophelia. Hamlet might consider both Gertrude and Ophelia to be accomplices to the murder of the senior Hamlet because of their cooperation with Claudius. Gertrude would be implicated because she married Claudius a mere two months after he murdered the senior Hamlet, and Ophelia would also be implicated because she allowed Polonius and Claudius to eavesdrop on her conversation with Hamlet. By cooperating with Claudius, they are all guilty in Hamlet's mind of contributing to the destruction of his father, the king, and all of Denmark because according to the body politic, they are all the same.

Anger, and the need for revenge, consumes Hamlet for nearly the entire play. He is torn because he is unable to balance reason with passion. He cannot control his anger, nor can he follow Laertes and allow himself to be consumed with anger at the expense of reason. The one time he allows himself to be overcome with anger, the murder of Polonius is the disastrous result. Shakespeare plays on this anger that is suppressed,

displaced, and inappropriately expressed at various points in the play. He uses it to take Hamlet's character from a sanguine university student, to an individual who alternates between melancholy and mania, until by the end of the play, very few characters have survived.

Horatio is one of these few survivors, and it is he who never elicits Hamlet's fury. He is the closest person to Hamlet who does not betray him or that Hamlet does not perceive betrays him. Perhaps it is Horatio, and not Laertes with whom Hamlet should have so closely identified himself. Out of all of the main characters, only Horatio achieves a suitable, workable balance between reason and passion. As Campbell states:

Horatio is not passion's slave, but one in
whom "blood and judgment are so well
commingled" that he is not a mere pipe for
Fortune to play upon (Campbell 147).

Hamlet is never able suitably to balance the two, and so he is not able to save himself from a seemingly nowin situation. Should he kill the king and avenge his father, or should he leave vengeance in the hands of God? Hamlet grapples with this agonizing decision in the privacy of his own soliloquies, but when it comes to his relationships with others, his anger consumes him, and in the process, it clouds all else. Until he is able to release his anger, which according to contemporary views could only be accomplished after he sought vengeance, he will not be able to use reason and passion to decide what should be done about Claudius. The irony, of course, is that

he cannot do one without jeopardizing the other.

After Hamlet succeeds in murdering Claudius, he is able to make peace with Laertes, and the rest of his anger is released. However, he is only able to seek his revenge on Claudius after he has killed Polonius and Ophelia, Gertrude, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern are dead. Had he been able to control his anger without sacrificing his passion and becoming sluggish and uncertain, perhaps he could have decided what to do about Claudius and then pursued that course of action. However, Hamlet's anger and his inability to come to terms with this anger is his tragic flaw, and without this flaw, he would have been a Horatio; someone who is not "Fortune's puppet," and the tragedy would not have been possible.

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