

One Hole Too Many: Ghosts and Mad Women in Hamlet and MacBeth

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the laugh of madness is an anticipation of the rictus grin of death, and the fool, the harbinger of the macabre, draws death's sting in the High Renaissance.

-- Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*

Hear me,

It is my life depends upon this spoken plea.

Think then, oh goddesses beneath the

ground. For I,

the dream of Clytaemnestra, call upon your

name.

-- Aeschylus, *The Eumenides*

I stopped the corpse-train, spang the coffin with my sword, broke it to the hilt, succeeded with eh blunt remains, and distributed teh dead progenitor FLESH ENJOINS HAP'LP FLESH to the faces of misery. Grief gave way to joy, joy into munching, on the empty coffin the murdere mounted the widow

-- Heiner Mueller, *The Hamletmachine*

One tore off an arm,

Another a foot still warm in its shoe. His ribs

Were clawed clean of flesh and every hand

Was smeared wtih blood as they played ball

with scraps

-- Euripides, *The Bacchae*

According to theorist Michel Foucault, Renaissance madness, as a negation of the positive capacities of the mind, is closely associated with the ultimate negation: death. Heiner Mueller, in a postmodern reworking of the Hamlet mythology, also establishes a connection between insanity and corpses, ghosts, and haunting. In the midst of King Hamlet's funeral procession, Hamlet the son leaps into the coffin (a prefiguring of his own imminent death) and literally feeds his father's remains to the frenzied, maddened crowd. Mueller's representation of *Hamlet* brings to mind Euripides' ancient Greek conception of insanity and mortality. In *The Bacchae*, a group of mad women unknowingly dismember the prince, Pentheus, and gruesomely sport with his remains (1.1164-1191). Euripides' representation of a close association between death and specifically mad women has particular resonance with Shakespeare. A close examination of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* provides a fascinating confirmation of the assertions of Foucault and Mueller. In these dramas, Shakespeare draws a close association between the experiences of female madness and ghostliness. Ophelia and Lady Macbeth, in their mad moments, as well as the ghost of King Hamlet and the ghost of Banquo, all share in serving as mirrors or blank canvases for their audiences, in lieu of possessing identities independent of external projections. While many scholars have debated the dramatic reality of King Hamlet's ghost,^[1] the principal question concerns the extent to which young Hamlet unconsciously fabricates the ghost's cries for revenge out of his own mental disturbance. We see a similar practice of over-identification with regard to Ophelia, whose identity before and after her descent into madness is appropriated and manipulated by other characters' self-serving narratives. In *Macbeth*, abstrusely significant supernatural phenomena, including the menacing presence of Banquo's ghost, beg for interpretation by the characters. In a parallel fashion, Lady Macbeth's madness is highly spectacular and performative, taking place before an audience who cannot help but extrapolate horrific truths from it. An explanation as to why two seemingly disparate groups (male ghosts and mad women) have this defining characteristic in common can be found in the words of Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, both a ghost and a mad woman. Significantly, the Greek queen must awaken the Furies to operate as her agents and exact revenge against Orestes' matricidal act. To her great frustration, Clytemnestra is unable to act on her own behalf. Similarly, the kinship established between ghosts and mad women in Shakespeare's plays can be located in their shared fundamental passivity in the face of violent male action.

Hamlet's Prophetic Soul and the Ghost of the King

Central to the question of the subjective integrity of King Hamlet's ghost is whether he is an entity with an identity independent of external perception, or a manifestation of an epidemic "madness" of *Hamlet's* characters. General consensus among literary critics holds that the ghost of King Hamlet, because it is visible to Hamlet, the watchmen, and the drama's audience, must actually be intended by Shakespeare to exist.^[2] However, others, including theorist W.W. Gregg, have suggested the ghost may merely be "a freak of collective suggestion." For instance, Gregg looks to the guards' preoccupation with the recent death of the king, coupled with the threat of war from Fortinbras, as possible explanations for the conjuring of ghosts into existence (410). In this theory of collective "madness," the ghost becomes an externalized spectre of the psychic disturbance of other characters, rather than a being with interior desires and motivations.

A close reading of the ghost's first appearance shows Gregg's understanding of the text is not without merit. We see the power of suggestion in action as Horatio is convinced that the ghost is not a "fantasy" (1.1. l.23), but an incarnation of the old king (Gregg 408). In order to convince Horatio, Marcellus begs, "let us once again assail your ears,/ That are so fortified against our story" (1.1. l.31-32). His militaristic language indicates that he engages in a violent assault against Horatio's reason. Once the ghost appears to him, Horatio says nothing until it is proposed to him that the shade is the ghost of King Hamlet: "Looks it not like the king?" (1.1. l.43). Once this suggestion is made, Horatio moves rapidly from cautious dubiety to a conviction equivalent to certainty in one's own existence. He responds: "As thou art to thyself" (1.1. l.59). Here, we see the possibility that the ghost of King Hamlet has no independent existence beyond mad external projection beginning to take shape.

A major flaw in Gregg's argument can perhaps be resolved in this examination of Horatio's path to belief. While Gregg accounts for why it is that each of the pertinent characters may be subject to the "ghost delusion," he never sufficiently addresses why the old king's ghost appears to the theatrical audience.^[3] Indeed, critics often cite this fact as the primary argument in favor of the ghost's concrete, independent existence.^[4] However, in these opening moments of the play, Horatio can be seen as a stand in for the audience. Like the spectators, Horatio has never seen the ghost, and is "entreated... to watch" the scene that ensues by Marcellus (1.1. l.25-26). In staging the drama in this way, Marcellus brings the audience into the world of theatrical delusion in the process of convincing Horatio of the reality of the ghost. Shakespeare compels us to suspend our disbelief and see the world through the eyes of the mad society of the stage. It is only once this delusion has been accepted that the playwright allows us to see the ghost king "in the flesh."

Hamlet's own susceptibility to this kind of mad, imaginative projection is perhaps easier to prove. While Claudius speaks with his own agenda in mind, his suggestion that Hamlet demonstrates "unmanly grief" in the wake of his father's death rings true in an age "whose common theme/ Is death of fathers" (1.2. l.94-105). Hamlet also claims to see his father in his mind's eye before Horatio even makes mention of the ghost (1.2. l.184). The fact that Hamlet chooses to communicate that his father is on his mind in this evocative way, suggesting a delusional haunting, seems significant. When Hamlet questions Horatio further, it becomes clear the ghost was armed "from top to toe," his face only partially visible through his helmet, making identification difficult (1.2. l.235-239). Furthermore, Horatio and Barnardo cannot agree over how long the ghost remained, indicating the unreliability of their perception (1.2. l.237-241). Heiner Mueller suggests that these signs of faulty assessment are irrelevant to Hamlet. His Hamlet character says, "Now comes the spectre who made me, the axe still in the skull. You can keep your hat on, I know, that you have one hole too many" (1). In *Hamletmachine*, Hamlet *insists* the ghost remain concealed, so that no definitive positive identification can be made (or disproved). Similarly, Shakespeare's Hamlet is willing to readily accept the dubious assessment of his men that the ghost is indeed the old king. When the ghost first appears to him, he immediately declares, "I'll call thee Hamlet" (1.4. l.23). In this way, the particularities of the ghost's subjective existence are rendered irrelevant in the face of what Hamlet and the other characters *need* him to be.

Thus far, our line of argument suggests that Hamlet and his fellow guards may be the authors of their own haunting. However, this possibility is primarily introduced as an illustration of the degree to which the ghost of King Hamlet is, for many characters, an *object* of interpretive discourse, with little reference to the ghost's *subjective* identity. What can be discussed more definitively in *Hamlet* is the extent to which Hamlet defines the import of the ghost's presence by (perhaps violently and artificially) bringing the ghost into conformity with his previously-existing beliefs and anxieties. Significantly, the ghost speaks to no one but Hamlet, suggesting that, even if the ghost *does* exist, what he says may merely be the product of Hamlet's fevered imagination. This is supported by the closet scene, in which Gertrude cannot perceive the ghost's presence, though Hamlet interacts with him (3.4. l.118-131).^[5] Furthermore, Hamlet claims he carries the memory of his encounter with King Hamlet's ghost in "the book and volume of [his] brain" (1.5. l.103), perhaps indicating that Hamlet's mind is the source of the ghost's existence.

The first utterance the ghost directs at Hamlet is "Mark me" (1.5. l.69), a call for Hamlet to derive significance from what he relates. However, Hamlet derives his own significances from the ghost's presence independent of the ghost's action or revelations. When he informs Hamlet of his murder, Hamlet cries "O my prophetic soul!" (1.5. l.40). The ghost merely confirms what Hamlet already believes, thereby rendering his vengeful thoughts and actions justified. While some scholars have insisted that the ghost as an independent intelligence supplies Hamlet with new knowledge in speaking of poison poured in the ear, W.W. Gregg argues that the ghost's elaborate tale is of Hamlet's own invention, prompted by a previous knowledge of the plot of *The Murder of Gonzago*. He argues that, while Hamlet may have added "an original 'speech of some dozen or sixteen lines,'" the initial plot of the play remains largely unaltered (402). Given that Hamlet mentions he has already seen the play before its Danish debut, Gregg concludes that Hamlet unconsciously derives the notion of poisoning via the ears from *Gonzago*, and then attributes this revelation to the ghost (415). However, even without this (perhaps overreaching) thesis, it remains apparent that the information the ghost provides is not new, but merely an affirmation of Hamlet's suspicions. In taking advantage of his power in order to woo Gertrude, Claudius literally abuses his position as the *king's ear*. Additionally, the notion of the ear as an orifice through which one can be poisoned clearly had currency for Shakespeare. In *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth communicates her desire to pour her (metaphysically poisonous) "spirits" into Macbeth's ear, so that she may prompt him to murder Duncan (1.5. p.31). From this, we can plausibly see how Hamlet might have taken these anxieties surrounding his father's death and projected them onto (or at least attributed them to) the ghost of the king.

Furthermore, Hamlet's "test" of the ghost's integrity reveals that his certainty of Claudius' guilt comes from within, rather than being impressed upon him by his dead father. The Mousetrap, the name by which the staging of *The Murder of Gonzago* is commonly referred, serves as flimsy, indirect confirmation of what the ghost has revealed to Hamlet. True confirmation for the audience is found in Claudius' prayer scene, in which he overtly admits to murdering his brother (3.3. l.36-38). Strangely, when Hamlet happens upon Claudius in the midst of his confession, he shows little interest in listening to Claudius and obtaining a more reliable admission of guilt than the Mousetrap yielded (Erlich 79). While the audience may desire a more definitive confirmation, Hamlet does not test the ghost's

assertion further because his suspicion of Claudius does not really arise from ghostly revelation. Regardless, Hamlet's Mousetrap test ignores an essential aspect of Elizabethan ghost lore: the fact that demons (Hamlet entertains the notion that the ghost is demonic from time to time) are able to tell the truth in order to lead people to damnation (Gajodisikova 27). Even if the Mousetrap proves the ghost's assertion to be correct, Hamlet may be being misled in a larger sense. This cavalier treatment of the reliability of the ghost's narrative indicates that, for Hamlet, the king's ghost is merely a pawn, and his revelation is only a reinforcement of Hamlet's deep, *a priori* certainty. Hamlet makes manifest Horatio's assertion that "There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave,/ To tell us this," with reference to the unrest in Denmark (1.5. l.130-131). King Hamlet's ghost is merely a location upon which the drama of the court and Hamlet's mental disturbance can be played out.

Ophelia: A Picture of Madness

Like King Hamlet's ghost, Ophelia's image (for that is all she is) acts as a mirror for the men around her even prior to her descent into madness. Her father, Polonius, defines Ophelia according to her position as his daughter: "I must tell you/You do not understand yourself so clearly /As it behoves my daughter and your honour" (1.3. l.95-97). Here, he claims to know Ophelia better than she knows herself, by virtue of her existence as a mere extension of *his own* selfhood. In response, Ophelia consents to let Polonius presume to teach her what to think (1.3. l.104). Consistent with this dynamic between father and daughter, Polonius is willing to read Ophelia's love letters aloud to the court, in the service of understanding what is wrong with Hamlet (2.2. l.96-125). While Hamlet's interiority is a profound mystery to be given thoughtful consideration, Ophelia's identity is perceived to be static, easily read (and determined) by her father as a tool in his political machinations.

Hamlet is also guilty of constructing a false notion of Ophelia's selfhood in order to further his own narrative of betrayal. He conflates Ophelia's sexuality with Gertrude's disturbing appetites, thereby denying her an identity independent of sinful womanhood. According to Hamlet, the spectacle of Ophelia's beauty precludes her honesty: "if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty" (3.1. l.108-109). As a woman, Ophelia is at best reduced to a purely superficial existence in beauty. At worst, her external presentation predicts her immoral character for all to see. Either interpretation of Hamlet's words coincides with his assessment of women as "paintings" (3.1. l.143). As with King Hamlet's ghost, the external reality of Ophelia's existence is regarded as more illuminating than her interior selfhood. Her beauty becomes an occasion for Hamlet to manifest his anxieties about hypocrisy and duplicity, vices he is guilty of in his pursuit of revenge.

Further evidence of Hamlet's projection of Gertrude's sins onto Ophelia's innocence can be found in their interaction. He commands her to cloister herself in a nunnery, so that she may not breed sinners (and sin itself) as Gertrude has (3.1. l.121-122). Here, Ophelia's reproductive potential is appropriated as an occasion for Hamlet to engage in self-loathing. He also claims that all women turn men into monsters, perhaps alluding to the ways in which Gertrude rendered his father a horned cuckold (Hibbard 244). Building off the sexualized satyr image, Hamlet cruelly identifies Ophelia as a "Nymph" on

whom all his sins are remembered (3.1. l.90-91). As with Polonius, Ophelia responds by defining herself as a mental void: "I think nothing" (3.2. l.109). Hamlet plays off this image of absence to joke about the female genitals, commonly referred to in Elizabethan slang as "nothing" (Showalter 222). Here, Ophelia identifies herself as the mental equivalent of her genitals, bringing Hamlet's obsession with her sexuality to its natural conclusion.

Heiner Mueller also takes note of the subordination of Ophelia's identity to Hamlet's. His Hamlet says, "let me eat your heart, Ophelia, which sheds my tears" (2). The fact that Hamlet believes Ophelia cries *his* tears suggests that, like Polonius, Hamlet regards her as an extension of his own identity. Specifically, Hamlet desires her to be a weeping angel, a memorial to his torment, as he has become a vengeful monument of the wrongful death of his father. We see Hamlet's view of feminine remembrance and memorialization in the following lines, spoken to Ophelia with reference to Gertrude's insufficient mourning: "there's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year. But, by'r Lady, he must build churches then, or else shall he suffer not thinking on" (3.2. l.122-126). Like the church built by the great man, Ophelia is "to show," not to speak her remembrance (3.2. l.135). Hamlet perceives her as a static monument of externality, by virtue as her role as a "picturesque" woman. By contrast, the kind of memorialization Hamlet demands of Horatio is far more active. In the throes of death, Hamlet requests that Horatio tell his story to the world (5.2. l.299-302). Horatio is allowed the luxury of speech and the performance of Hamlet's suffering while Ophelia must remain a voiceless image.

Ophelia's mad moments do come to act as a monument to Hamlet, though not as he intends. According to Claudius, she becomes "A document in madness—thoughts and *remem-/brance* fitted" (4.5. l.179-180, emphasis added). Ophelia memorializes the ways in which Hamlet's behavior as an avenger has brought her to mad, incoherent anguish. However, Ophelia's (perhaps deliberate) subversion of the traditional "readings" of her through madness ultimately lends itself to her becoming an object of interpretive discourse. While her volatility prevents others from controlling her as they did before, the inscrutability of her madness gives characters the opportunity to interpret and falsely translate her significance. According to Horatio, her mental distraction is merely a continuation of the systematic denial of Ophelia's subjectivity.

Her speech is nothing

Yet the unshaped use of it doth move

The hearers to collection. They aim at it,

And botch the words up to fit their own thoughts. (4.5. l.7-10, emphasis added)

He depicts Ophelia's presentation of identity as brute clay to be molded by the observer into the shapes they desire, spectres of their own identity. We see how her irrational, imagistic language prompts visions of what the characters are inclined to see, according to their previously-existing anxieties and preoccupations. Significantly, theorist Shigeo Kikuchi refers to this phenomenon in literature as "Ghost Implicature" (105). Kikuchi defines Ghost Implicature as a false inference made by an interlocutor when

a speaker's meaning is ambiguous or uncertain (108). These false inferences are often made on the basis of *a priori* beliefs, awaiting confirmation. For instance, in *Othello*, Iago's vague language is perceived by Othello as an affirmation of his suspicion his wife is guilty of adultery (Kikuchi 107).

While Kikuchi speaks with reference to *Othello*, Ghost Implicature is also at play in the scenes featuring the mad Ophelia. Like King Hamlet's ghost, Ophelia asks that her audience "mark" what she has to say (4.5. 1.34). However, the mad woman lacks the ghost's clarity of speech. The ways in which her mad, imagistic ramblings are interpreted say less about Ophelia than they do about the characters around her. Gertrude, riven with guilt over her betrayal of her late husband, fears that Ophelia's madness will reveal her complicity: "So full of artless jealousy is guilt,/ It spills itself in fearing to be spilt" (4.5. 1.19-20). Though Ophelia makes continual references to her romantic betrayal, (she speaks of "true love," a "cockle hat" and Saint Valentine's Day (4.5. 1.23-47)), Claudius insists she is driven mad solely by the death of her father (4.5. 1.43). This suits his plan to direct Laertes' vengeful wrath towards Hamlet, Polonius' murderer, rather than himself (4.5. 1. 149-154).

When Ophelia encounters Laertes, she speaks through a discussion of flowers, a language with potent, but, once more, ambiguous imagery that begs for outside interpretation (4.5. 1.177-178). In response, Laertes comments, "Hadst thou thy wits, and did persuade revenge,/ It could not move thus" (4.5. 1.170-171). Laertes asserts that Ophelia's madness, in which interpretive agency is taken from her and bestowed upon the observer, is the most effective inspiration for him to fulfill his duty. In this, Ophelia functions similarly to the quintessential revenge ghost, most notably Don Andrea in *The Spanish Tragedy*. Like Ophelia, it is not Andrea's action, but his mere inciting (though unseen) presence on the stage that prompts Horatio to pursue revenge (Kyd 1.3. 1.184-188).

Elaine Showalter explores the ways in which Ophelia's superficiality manifests itself in the history of dramatic performance. She discusses the predominant concern with Ophelia as an image, accompanied with a careful attention to issues of costume and the physical presentation of the Ophelia actress. In the Bad Quarto, Ophelia's externality is fundamentally and symbolically connected to her internal condition. She "dresses in white, decks herself with 'fantastical garlands' of wildflowers, and enters... playing on a lute with her 'hair down singing.'" All of this imagery, according to Showalter, speaks to Ophelia's troubled relationship with sexuality, her conflicted exhibition of innocence and "whorish contamination" (224). Later, in the eighteenth century, contemporary perceptions of "female love-melancholy" minimized the potency of female madness.^[6] Once again, this change is manifested in Ophelia's physical appearance; she becomes an image of "polite feminine distraction" (226). As Showalter illustrates, dramatic presentations of Ophelia throughout history have reinforced Hamlet's assessment of her as a "picture," in which metaphysical issues of identity are externally and superficially displayed (4.5. 1.82). While the Ophelia of the dramatic text acts as a symbolic location on which masculine anxieties are projected, the staged Ophelia becomes an image of contemporary feminine mores and fashions. Nonetheless, in both cases she is denied subjectivity.

Given the extent to which Ophelia acts as a mirror for others, the fact that Ophelia dies by drowning, inundated by water, a kind of "glassy" or reflective surface is unsurprising (4.7. l.142). Indeed, Gertrude goes so far as to call the water her "native...element" (4.7. l.154-155). The sexual connotations of a watery grave are further emphasized by the fact that she wears a crown of flowers with phallic associations: "long purples/ That liberal shepherds give a grosser name" (4.7. l.145-146). Furthermore, Ophelia is denied the opportunity to dramatize her demise on the stage, as Gertrude relates to the audience the particulars of her drowning. Once again, her story is mediated through the self-interested narrative of a third party. Even in death, Ophelia's identity is overwhelmed (or drowned) by those things that she pictorially symbolizes for others: issues of eroticism and problematic masculinity.

Banquo's Ghost and the Supernatural in *Macbeth*

As with the mad Ophelia, supernatural events in *Macbeth*, by virtue of their inscrutability, demand presumptive, interpretive thought from their spectators. We see another fascinating similarity between Ophelia and *Macbeth's* three witches: their incomprehensibility is also physically manifested. While Ophelia portrays both sexual chastity and promiscuity in her appearance, the witches' androgyny portends the ambiguity of their prophecies. Banquo (alive, for the moment), cannot help but endeavor to have the witches conform to typical gender binaries: "You should be women,/ And yet your beards forbid me to interpret/ That you are so" (1.3. p.25). Once the women have dispensed their predictions, Macbeth evinces frustration that they are "imperfect speakers" (1.3. p.26), and their words require further analysis in order to determine their import. Such interpretation reveals more about the interpreter than the prophecy to be deciphered. Macbeth, coming to this conclusion himself, speaks to the way in which the witches' divination leads to self-revelation: "Augures and understood relations have... brought forth/ The secret'st man of blood" (3.4. p.62). One can imagine Macbeth is not surprised when one of the figures in the witches' prophetic dumb-show holds up a looking-glass to him (4.1. p.70). Interestingly, a confirmation of this phenomenon (albeit in psychoanalytical form) is found in Freud, who asserts that the appearance of the uncanny reflects an element of the observer's unconscious being brought too close to the surface (132). A Freudian understanding of the relation between Macbeth and the witches' prophecies holds that, like Ophelia and Polonius, the witches are merely an extension of a repressed aspect of Macbeth's identity. According to this reading, the supernatural women become a one-dimensional aspect of the complexities of Macbeth's psychology.

The witches' prophecies, due to their lyrically cryptic language, enact Ghost Implicature upon Macbeth as Ophelia does in *Hamlet*. It is the false inferences Macbeth derives from their predictions that lead to his downfall. When the women predict "Macbeth shall never vanquished be, until/ Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane hill/ shall come against him," Macbeth believes he is safe (4.1. p.69). Ironically, in spite of his own inclinations toward insanity, he expects that the rest of the world will remain sane, and operate according to the normal laws of nature. The conflation of the witches' prophecies with imagistic and incoherent "spewings," to be interpreted and restored to sense by the (importantly masculine) observer, is confirmed in the following moment. When the witches ask, "Say, if thou'dst rather hear it from our mouths,/ Or from our masters", Macbeth replies, "let me see 'em" (4.1. p.68). Given the option of learning of the future through the witches' words or by viewing strange images, Macbeth chooses the latter, by far the more abstruse. Their prophetic speech is regarded by Macbeth as equivalent (or even

inferior) to a pageant of spectacle pregnant with imagery that must be birthed into meaning by the midwife-interpreter.

The ghost of Banquo is another character whose mere presence on stage speaks more to Macbeth than any of the particularities of the ghost's independent identity. In fact, like King Hamlet's ghost, literary scholars are uncertain as to whether Banquo's ghost possesses *any* reality outside of Macbeth's frenzied imagination.^[7] Central to this question is the fact that, aside from the audience, Macbeth is the only individual to actually perceive the ghost, though he appears in a room full of people (3.4. p.58-59). On one side of the debate, Elmer Edgar Stoll argues that, for Elizabethan audiences, revenge ghosts in drama were regarded as having a concrete existence (205). Accordingly, Macbeth's declaration, "Unreal mockery, hence!" (3.4. p.61) is understood to be a perhaps self-assuring assertion of Banquo's physical insubstantiality, rather than his non-existence (Stoll 216). Nonetheless, the play also provides us with evidence that Macbeth hallucinates the ghost's visitation. As many critics have noted, Banquo's ghost disappears each time Macbeth challenges his reality (Stoll 216). Furthermore, Lady Macbeth deflects suspicion by informing the company that Macbeth is manifesting a condition that has plagued him since childhood: "my lord is often thus,/ And hath been from his youth" (3.4. p.59). While this may be a falsehood, her speech introduces the possibility that Macbeth is vulnerable to such illusions. Privately, Macbeth all but admits to this susceptibility:

My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,

Shakes so my single state of mind that function

Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is

But what is not. (1.3. p.28)

Here, Macbeth confesses that the intellectual anticipation of murder taints his perceptions of the world around him, such that he cannot be certain of the reality of things. As with *Hamlet*, such uncertainty as to the reality of the ghost speaks to the extent to which Banquo's ghost's identity is determined not by himself, but by the projections and interpretations of other characters. The ghost lacks an existence independent of external perception.

The primary difference between the ghost of King Hamlet and the ghost of Banquo is the fact that Banquo never speaks. As Stoll notes, Banquo has no need to: his silent presence brings to the fore Macbeth's anxieties in a way King Hamlet's ghost cannot without verbal explanation (204). While Hamlet requires justification from his father's ghost in order to pursue his vendetta against Claudius, Macbeth's relationship with the ghost of Banquo is primarily concerned with Macbeth's fear of exposure (both of the murder and his mental distraction). The mere *fact* of Banquo's ghost proves Macbeth's prediction that, "Bloody instructions... being taught, return/ To plague the inventor" (1.7. p.35). His sins literally return to haunt him. Once again, Freud's understanding of the uncanny provides an illuminating confirmation of the ghost's significance. Freud writes that the uncanny "can be shown to come from something repressed which *recurs*" (147, emphasis added), or, in the case of Banquo, *returns*. Like the hallucination of the bloody dagger, the ghost of Banquo appears to Macbeth in order to remind him of

the gruesome realities of his actions. Macbeth speaks of Banquo's "gory locks" and of the "charnel-house" from which he came (3.4. p.59-60). Such language is reminiscent of the biological imagery with which Macbeth interprets the import of the dagger: "It is the bloody business, which informs/ Thus to mine eyes" (2.1. p.39). Macbeth further reinforces the association between Banquo's ghost and the dagger. After the vision of the dagger, he describes murder in a personified manner as a wolfish ghost, moving with "ravishing strides" (2.2. p.40). Placing Banquo's ghost on the same level as the dagger hallucination diminishes him to a mute image that can do nothing to clarify his own existence, but must wait for the creative act of interpretation to be imposed on him by Macbeth.

Lady Macbeth: Vapidity and Reiteration

In a telling contrast to her husband, Lady Macbeth cannot see the ghost. She insists that, like the bloodied dagger, Banquo's spectre is nothing but a "painting" of Macbeth's fear (3.4. p.60). In the act of dismissing Banquo as a pictorial manifestation of Macbeth's guilty conscience, Lady Macbeth unknowingly speaks of herself. Like a painting or other one-dimensional figure, she lacks an internal life of the mind and knowledge of her own selfhood. In the moment in which Duncan is murdered, Lady Macbeth's speech suggests that she may be intoxicated. With reference to Duncan's guards, she says, "That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold" (2.2. p.40). Just moments earlier, in laying out her murderous plan, Lady Macbeth discusses the effect of drinking on the mind. She intends to ply the guards with wine until "memory, the warder of the brain,/ Shall be a fume" (1.7. p.36). While Macbeth is tortured by a clear consciousness of his guilt, Lady Macbeth appears mentally absent from the murder scene in an essential way. This may account for her casual assertion after the fact that "A little water clears us of this deed" (2.3. p.42). As the murderous action was spurred by intoxicating liquid, Lady Macbeth believes another liquid will bring the moment to its conclusion. Later, it is exactly Lady Macbeth's failure to purify herself of the metaphorical blood on her hands that manifests itself in her madness (5.1. p.84). However, she lacks the self-knowledge to anticipate the ways in which her blood-guilt will return to haunt her. Lady Macbeth's ignorance is also expressed in the suddenness with which madness comes upon her. Her abrupt and unexpected break from reality is in sharp contrast to her husband. The action of the play traces at length Macbeth's gradual and self-reflective descent into madness, as he continually takes stock of the "Strange things [he has] in head" (3.4. p.62).

Coupled with Lady Macbeth's undeveloped sense of self is an undue emphasis on the importance of external presentation. According to J.P. Dyson, "Lady Macbeth ... sees reality, but of a limited sort... She thinks that reality is what you make it" (373). Unconcerned with the moral implications of their plans for Duncan, she insists that the key to success is to deceive the world of their innocence. She instructs her husband to "look like the innocent flower,/ But be the serpent under't" (1.6. p.33). Here, Lady Macbeth brings her husband into the world of appearance, the domain of women. While Macbeth sequesters himself and grapples with his conscience, Lady Macbeth concentrates her energies on entertaining their guests at banquet, and appearing as an innocent flower (1.7. p.35). Later, in response to Macbeth's ravings in the presence of the ghost, it is once again Lady Macbeth who is concerned with how others perceive them. She chastens Macbeth for his public display of their guilt: "You have displaced the mirth, broke the/ good meeting, /With *most admir'd* disorder" (3.4. p.61, emphasis added). While Macbeth struggles to reconcile the warring impulses of his private self, Lady Macbeth carefully cultivates her

public image, at the expense of her more internal identity. She is the deceitful woman-as-"painting" that Hamlet fears.

Psychological theorist Hyman L. Muslin provides an illuminating complication to this understanding of Lady Macbeth's lack of selfhood. Appropriating psychoanalytical theory, Muslin contends that Macbeth and his wife represent the "self" and "selfobject" respectively. This means that Macbeth regards Lady Macbeth as the source of his "self-cohesiveness," or as a repository for elements of his identity (362). While Muslin is particularly concerned with the parenting role Lady Macbeth adopts with respect of her husband, I would argue that her reinforcement of Macbeth's identity manifests itself most clearly in her insistence that he perform his gender. Every time Macbeth expresses weakness or hesitation, Lady Macbeth calls him to action by reminding him of his manhood. When he is reluctant to pursue their plan to assassinate Duncan, Lady Macbeth seduces him with the promise of masculine prowess: "you would/ Be so much more the man" (1.7. p.36). While Macbeth is haunted by Banquo, she mockingly tells him not to be "unmann'd in folly" (3.4. p.60). Furthermore, Lady Macbeth's gender confusion ("unsex me here" (1.5. p.32)) can be understood to be a product of Macbeth's masculine identity residing within her. That she can act as a vessel for her husband's selfhood indicates how empty her own identity is. It is for this reason that Lady Macbeth cannot see the ghost of Banquo. As I have argued, ghosts constitute objects or spaces onto which characters can project reflections of their own psyches. However, Lady Macbeth is herself a mirror for her husband, with an under-developed identity that casts no shadow. The effect of Lady Macbeth looking upon Banquo is the same as two mirrors placed before each other: she sees nothing because she is nothing herself.

Lady Macbeth's elaborate public persona and barren private identity also manifest themselves in her performance of madness. Marjorie Garber aptly describes her mad scene as "a perfect miniature of the play's action and the audience's response" (87). Before an audience of her doctor and noblewoman, Lady Macbeth re-dramatizes the critical events of the play. Her somnambulant letter writing reenacts the scene in which Macbeth sends a missive informing her of Duncan's arrival. She also dwells on the blood spilt in the process of the king's murder. Finally, Lady Macbeth's statement, "Wash your hands, put on your nightgown,/look not so pale" (5.1. p.83-84) dramatizes the meager consolation she provides for her husband (and for herself) in the wake of Duncan's death. Critically, these mad musings take place before two rapt spectators, whose expressions of shock and horror mirror those in the audience of *Macbeth*. The doctor and attendant confer over the import of Lady Macbeth's revelations, without once addressing her, as though she were a dumb specimen to be studied and deciphered (5.1. p.84-85). As with Ophelia and the ghosts, all interpretive agency is taken out of her hands, and given to her audience.

Our understanding of Lady Macbeth's madness as a kind of theatre intersects with the theories of literary critic Marvin Carlson. Carlson draws a parallel between experiences of dramatic performance and ghostliness. He argues that theatre constitutes a "reenactment of events already enacted, the reexperience of emotions already experienced" (3). The ghosts of previous performances of the same play, of past actors and of current actors' earlier roles haunt every theatrical production (4). In

psychoanalytical terms, Freud takes up a similar position. As I have previously mentioned, he understands the uncanny in terms of the repetition or reiteration of events: "The quality of uncanniness can only come from the circumstance of the 'double'" (141). While both theorists concern themselves with the question of reiteration, an exploration of the phenomena takes them in different directions. For Carlson, theatrical repetition can be understood as a kind of haunting. Freud, on the other hand, sees uncanny doubling as a manifestation of mental distress. Lady Macbeth proves both thinkers to be correct: in re-dramatizing the play in which she is a character, Lady Macbeth blurs the line between madwoman and ghost. Additionally, both Carlson and Freud concur in the assessment that the "actor" in question (whether psychological or theatrical) is being passively acted upon. Lady Macbeth's experience of mad, ghostly theatre is something that ultimately happens to her.

How is a Ghost like a Madwoman?

Having analyzed the ways in which Shakespeare's most famous madwomen share a common experience with ghosts, it seems necessary to explore *why* these two groups share such a kinship. A look back to ancient Greek tragedy sheds some light on the issue. In Aeschylus' *The Eumenides*, Clytaemnestra is both a ghost and a mad woman. She appears briefly in only one scene, in which she rouses the Furies from their slumber in order to pursue vengeance against her murderer and son, Orestes. What is significant for our purposes is the fact that that Clytaemnestra cannot exact justice herself, but must enact her will through third parties. Indeed, she must stoop so far as to beg for their aid:

Hear me.

It is my life depends upon this spoken plea.

Think then, oh goddesses beneath the ground. For I,

the dream of Clytaemnestra, call upon your name. (138)

As ephemeral as a dream, Clytaemnestra has minimal, indirect agency in the world of the living. Her condition in *The Eumenides* starkly contrasts her role in *Agamemnon*, in which the potency of her action has horrific consequences for the polis.^[8] Ultimately, it is this helplessness and passivity the Greek queen embodies that is shared by Ophelia, Lady Macbeth, and the ghosts.

The ghost of King Hamlet expresses his incapacity for action through the image of the glowworm. In bidding farewell to his son, the ghost declares, "Fare thee well at once./ The glow-worm shows the matin to be near,/ And gins to pale his uneffectual fire" (1.5. l.88-90). Like the glowworm, whose body gives off light but no heat, King Hamlet is a mere shadow of his former self, with no capacity for direct physical action. The worm image can also be compared to similar lines in *Pericles*: "a glowworm in the night,/ The which have fire in darkness, none in light" (Shakespeare qtd. in Hibbard 190). As with the worm, occasions when the ghost of the king can make himself manifest in the physical world are limited to particular hours of the night, between midnight and the crowing of the cock (1.2. l.217-219). This material insubstantiality renders the ghost incapable of avenging his own murder, as it does with Clytaemnestra. When Marcellus endeavors to strike the old king, he is unable to (1.1. l.123-126).

Conversely, we can assume King Hamlet's ghost is incapable of inflicting violence in return. In order to pursue his will, he must act indirectly through the use of his son as a Fury-like agent.

In *Macbeth*, the ghost of Banquo shows some ability to physically menace his intended target. Macbeth is unable to sit at his place at dinner, because the ghost occupies it (3.4. p.59). Nonetheless, the fact that, in the throes of death, Banquo compels his son to seek revenge on his behalf (3.4. p.57) suggests that his ghost is similar to King Hamlet's in physical passivity and diminished agency. He appears in ghost form only twice throughout the play, in order to speed Macbeth along the road to madness. However, Macbeth's mental state prior to the ghost's first appearance indicates his efforts are unnecessary, perhaps futile. In the moments before his first encounter with the ghost, Macbeth mutters to himself: "I am cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd, bound in/ To saucy doubts and fears" (3.4. p.58). This quotation suggests that, even without the minimal interventions of Banquo's ghost, Macbeth would inevitably devolve into madness.

While Ophelia may have the benefit of corporeal existence, her gender precludes her from any kind of agency or action. In Heiner Mueller's interpretation of *Hamlet*, Ophelia is said to possess a clockwork heart (3). This notion of Ophelia as a mechanized character emphasizes her lack of choice: she operates as programmed by society and the men who love her. Ophelia's particular brand of insanity is often considered to be a type of melancholy, or love sickness. Significantly, Elizabethans regarded melancholy as a feminized form of madness, characterized by profound passivity. Carol Thomas Neely notes that, "While 'madness' and 'distraction' denote excessive and often violent activity and behavior visible to others, 'melancholy' in contrast, denotes torpor, passivity, and the inner emotions of fear and sorrow" (4). Throughout the play, Ophelia makes manifest this melancholic stance. Virtually all of her action is prompted at the behest of the men around her. She first spurns Hamlet's advances under Polonius' advisement: "as you did command/ I did repel his letters" (2.1. l.109-110). Next, Polonius and Claudius arrange for Ophelia to encounter Hamlet, so that they may determine whether Hamlet is susceptible to love-sickness himself (2.2. l.160-163). Hamlet's cruel use of Ophelia proves his own melancholy is not Ophelia's kind of love-sickness, and he is once more restored to the masculine action. Indeed, Claudius' fear of Hamlet's potency prompts him to neutralize the threat by sending him to England (3.1. l.163-176). By contrast, Ophelia remains in a state of melancholic passivity, ultimately culminating in full-blown madness. This dichotomy of agency between Hamlet and Ophelia is once more represented in Mueller's image of the machine. In *Hamletmachine*, Hamlet says, "My thoughts are wounds in my brain. My brain is a wound. I want to be a machine. Arms to grasp legs to walk no pain no thoughts" (7). The fact that Hamlet desires to be mechanized proves that he is not mechanical, that he is cursed with the burden of independent thought and action, or "bleeding." Ophelia, on the other hand, has already been presented with a clock for a heart. It is she who is passive, mechanical, with "no thoughts."

Like Ophelia, Lady Macbeth struggles with the limitations imposed upon her by virtue of her gender. One of her most famous speeches gives voice to this frustration:

Come, you spirits

*That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty; make thick my blood...
Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers. (1.5. p.32)*

Here, she desires to be masculinized so that she may complete the murder she fears her husband is too weak to commit. Indeed, it could be argued that it is Lady Macbeth who deserves the "honor" of the murderous act, rather than Macbeth. It is she who entertains Duncan and his retinue while Macbeth cowers in his chamber (1.7. p.34). She is also the one to drug the guards and cover them with blood to ensure they will be blamed (2.2. p.42). However, she is denied the opportunity to murder Duncan, the central action of the play, due to a haunting of her own: she cannot kill him because the sleeping man reminds her of her father (2.2. p.40). As with Ophelia, her obligations as a dutiful daughter preclude her from completely engaging in the world of masculine violence. Though Macbeth lacks the passion and bloodlust of Lady Macbeth, it must be he who reluctantly kills the king on her behalf. This assessment of the passive, and, indeed, *pacifist* role of women is confirmed by other characters in the play. After the assassination is discovered, Macduff, in a moment of dramatic irony, refuses to discuss the event in Lady Macbeth's presence: "'Tis not for you to hear what I can speak: The repetition, in a woman's ear,/ Would murder as it fell" (2.3. p.45). Macduff is tragically (and misogynistically) unaware of the fact that, as we know, Lady Macbeth is herself a poisoner of ears (1.5. p.31). Furthermore, it is only ever Macbeth, as the masculine representative of his household, who is vilified for Duncan's murder.

What becomes clear in an investigation of the experiences of passivity encountered by Shakespeare's ghosts and mad women is that Ophelia and Lady Macbeth exist in a kind of living death. They are subject to a condition of living without agency that King Hamlet, Banquo, and even Clytemnestra experience only in the afterlife. While King Hamlet and Banquo are limited in worldly action only by their corporeal impotence, the impotence of Shakespeare's mad women is far more profound and insidious. The desperation of their condition is expressed in Lady Macbeth's desire for a transfiguration of her weak, feminine bodily fluids (including the breast milk required to nourish children) into a thicker, more masculine kind of blood (1.5. p.32). The association between blood and male sexual potency and phallic power also speaks to Lady Macbeth's unsatisfied desire for agency. The need of Ophelia and Lady Macbeth to thicken, to become more physically present in spite of a corporeality the ghosts do not possess, is indicative of the inherent and tragic ghostliness of Shakespeare's mad women.

Conclusion

The comparison of two of Shakespeare's most famous leading ladies with their ghostly counterparts leads to several revelations. Banquo and King Hamlet express frustration that their masculine desires for heroic, violent action are thwarted by the corporeal and ontological ambiguities of their ghostly condition. In this way, the two ghosts can be read as traditional Shakespearean heroes, hampered by feminine experiences of embodiment as unreliable, uncertain, and inferior. From a feminist perspective,

Shakespeare expresses the condition of contemporary women (both mad and sane) by dramatizing their condition through the lens of degraded, ghostly men. Like ghosts, Ophelia and Lady Macbeth are *insubstantial beings*. Selfhood is a performance for these women: their identities are read and constructed for them, according to the agendas and desires of their audience. One is left to wonder whether Shakespeare, himself an actor, indeed rumored to play the role of King Hamlet (Bloom 53), intends his ghosts and madwomen to act as a commentary on the theatrical process itself. Like ghosts and mad women, theatrical performers exist in a position of bodily and ontological uncertainty with their audiences; any kind of address to the spectator from an actor, as though they were "real" people on stage, would compromise the effect of dramatic absorption. Paradoxically, actors must deliberately take up, and manipulate to their advantage, the condition of liminal non-existence that is a source of such tragedy for Shakespeare's ghosts and mad women.

[1] See *Hamlet Closely Observed*, by Martin Dodsworth; *Hamlet's Absent Father*, by Avi Erlich, (Erlich also makes mention of critic A.C. Bradley); "Unveiling the Dramatic Secret of "Ghost" in Hamlet" by Shigeo Kikuchi; "Gertrude, Ophelia, Ghost: Hamlet's Revenge and the Abject" by Chikako D. Kumamoto; "The Objectivity of Ghosts in Shakespeare" by Elmer Edgar Stoll; as well as "Hamlet's Hallucination" by W.W. Gregg.

[2] Elmer Edgar Stoll quotes F. C. Moorman in the *Modern Language Review* on the traditional view of King Hamlet's Ghost: "The ghost of the 'majesty of buried Denmark' stands on a different footing [than the ghost of Banquo]. Of its reality there can be no question" (Moorman qtd. in Stoll 202).

[3] W.W. Gregg also admits that, "Belief in the genuineness and objectivity of the Ghost in *Hamlet* has been almost universal" and that, "Any other view supposes a considerable amount of subtlety on the part of the author in hinting that statements, and even apparent action, are not to be taken at their face value" (395). His way of accounting for the appearance of the ghost to the audience is to insist that Shakespeare is this kind of "subtle" author.

[4] Elmer Edgar Stoll argues that Elizabethan tradition demanded that all beings represented on stage were "actual and objective" (220).

[5] Elmer Edgar Stoll insists that Elizabethan folklore allows for a ghost to credibly "appear to only one person in a multitude" (217).

[6] The Ophelia character becomes so harmless and mainstream that contemporary French women of fashion began to dress in imitation of her. Women wore "a coiffure 'a la folle,' consisting of a 'black veil with wisps of straw tastefully interwoven' in the hair" (Showalter 227).

[7] Elmer Edgar Stoll takes stock of the traditional critical discourse regarding the reality of Shakespeare's ghost characters in "The Objectivity of Ghosts in Shakespeare." General wisdom among theorists holds that, while the ghost of King Hamlet possesses an independent existence, the ghost of Banquo is unreal, a symptom of Macbeth's guilt-induced madness (201-202).

[8] In *Agamemnon*, Clytaemnestra orchestrates the brutal murder of her husband Agamemnon upon his return from Troy. It is this action that prompts her son Orestes to kill her (source).

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