

**SHAKESPEARE and MADNESS**

**A PAPER**

**presented by**

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O, that way madness lies: let me shun that:

No more of that.

*King Lear*  
III. iv. 21-22.

He who looks outside dreams

He who looks inside awakens.

*Memories, Dreams, Reflections*  
Carl Jung.

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## SHAKESPEARE and MADNESS

### I

#### THE TRAGEDIES

Shakespeare's four great tragedies – *Hamlet* (1600-1601), *Othello* (1603-1604), *King Lear* (1605-1606) and *Macbeth* (1606) – were written in but seven years. They are the zenith of English literature. In each of the plays Shakespeare takes a great and honoured person and traces their unravelling through one flaw. With *Hamlet*, indecision; *Othello*, jealousy; *Lear*, senility; and *Macbeth*, ambition. In each of the plays there is structure: the initiation; the choice; and the destruction. There is free will in Shakespeare – until the choice is made, in the third Act of the five-Act play. Then the die is cast and the tragedy inexorable.

To commence, let us recall a passage from each of the tragedies and which sets the tone of the play.

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#### ***Macbeth* and ambition**

The darkest, and most poetical, of the great tragedies is *Macbeth*. Hear these words of beauty – lightness which makes the dark more foreboding – in the opening Act, spoken by two warriors, the king of Scotland and a general of the King's Army:

*Duncan:*     This castle hath a pleasant seat: the air  
                  Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself  
                  Unto our gentle senses.

*Banquo:*     This guest of summer,  
                  The temple-haunting martlet, does approve  
                  By his loved mansionry that the heaven's breath  
                  Smells wooingly here: no jutty, frieze,  
                  Buttress, nor coign of vantage but this bird  
                  Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle:  
                  Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed  
                  The air is delicate."

*Macbeth*  
I. vi. 1-11.

Now hear the words of a Lady when her husband hesitates at murder:

*“Lady Macbeth:* I have given suck, and know  
How tender ‘tis to love the babe that milks me:  
I would, while it was smiling in my face,  
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums,  
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you  
Have done to this.

*Macbeth* (the Thane of Glamis and future King of Scotland):  
If we should fail?

*Lady Macbeth:* We fail?  
But screw your courage to the sticking-place  
And we’ll not fail.”

*Macbeth*  
I. vii. 58-67.

These passages are in shocking contrast. Deliberately so. Shakespeare often is brutal and shocking, as often he is serene and beautiful. In these passages we see both.

It was Lady Macbeth’s inner strength that gave active strength to her husband. But while then he proceeded from achievement to achievement through murder and murder, her strength ebbed and she descended into madness. And when inevitably she dies by her own hand, her husband now king but in poetical nihilism, three hundred years before Dostoyevsky, says:

*“Macbeth:* Wherefore was that cry?

*Seyton:* The Queen, my lord, is dead.

*Macbeth:* She should have died hereafter:  
There would have been a time for such a word.  
Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time:  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle.  
Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.”

*Macbeth*  
V.v. 16-28.

## **Lear and senility**

Lear, King of Britain. Aged eighty, an absolute ruler, descending into senility. Having rejected his beloved daughter, Cordelia, who refused to fawn upon him, he is rejected by his two daughter-beneficiaries, Goneril and Regan. Power, age and senility in confluence destroy him. His mind is reflected externally by the storm on the heath:

*“Lear.* Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!  
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout  
Till you have drench’d our steeples, drown’d the  
cocks!  
You sulph’rous and thought-excecuting fires,  
Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,  
Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking  
thunder,  
Strike flat the thick rotundity o’ th’ world!  
Crack Nature’s moulds, all germens spill at once  
That makes ingrateful man!...  
Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! Spout, rain!  
Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters:  
I tax you not, you elements, with unkindness;  
I never gave you kingdom, call’d you children,  
You owe me no subscription: then let fall  
Your horrible pleasure; here I stand, your slave,  
A poor, infirm, weak, and despis’d old man.  
But yet I call you servile ministers,  
That will with two pernicious daughters join  
Your high-engender’d battles ‘gainst a head  
So old and white as this. O, ho! ‘tis foul.”

*King Lear*  
III. ii. 1-24.

And later, when he meets the Earl of Gloucester, whose eyes have been put out at Lear’s daughter’s behest (Regan), in a passage highly relevant for judges in office:

*“Lear.* Look with thine ears:  
See how yond justice rails upon yond simple thief.  
Hark, in thine ear: change places, and, handy-dandy,  
which is the justice, which is the thief? Thou hast seen a  
farmer’s dog bark at a beggar?  
*Glou.* Ay, Sir.  
*Lear.* And the creature run from the cur? There thou might’st behold  
The great image of Authority:

A dog's obey'd in office.  
Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand!  
Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back;  
Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind  
For which thou whipp'st her. The usurer hangs the cozener.  
Through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear;  
Robes and furr'd gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,  
And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;  
Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does pierce it.  
None does offend, none, I say, none; I'll able 'em:  
Take that of me, my friend, who have the power  
To seal th' accuser's lips. Get thee glass eyes;  
And, like a scurvy politician, seem  
To see the things thou dost not."

*King Lear*  
IV. v. 151-173.

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### ***Othello and jealousy***

Domestic violence. How inadequately the law has handled this. Shakespeare wrote a play about it: *Othello*, the Moor of Venice. It is a difficult play for us: did Shakespeare, as the law has, excuse domestic violence? Othello's jealousy is fed by the evil Iago, and Othello through jealousy murders his wife Desdemona. Does it matter whether his jealousy was factually based or not? No, it does not. The play concludes, as often the law does, with a murder-suicide. This said beside Desdemona, who lies dead on the marital bed:

*"Othello:*     Soft you; a word or two before you go.  
I have done the state some service, and they know't –  
No more of that. I pray you, in your letters,  
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,  
Speak of me as I am: nothing extenuate,  
Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak  
Of one that loved not wisely but too well:  
Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,  
Perplexed in the extreme: of one whose hand,  
Like the base Judean, threw a pearl away  
Richer than all his tribe: of one whose subdued eyes,  
Albeit unused to the melting mood,  
Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees  
Their medicinable gum. Set you down this,  
And say besides, that in Aleppo once,

Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk  
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,  
I took by th' throat the circumcised dog  
And smote him, thus.

STABS HIMSELF

*Lodovico:* O bloody period!

*Gratiano:* All that is spoke is marred.

*Othello:* I kissed thee ere I killed thee: no way but this,  
Killing myself, to die upon a kiss.

KISSES DESDEMONA  
DIES."

*Othello*  
V.ii.381-403.

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### ***Hamlet and indecision***

Hamlet is a play about introspection and indecision. Hamlet expressed the tension thus:

"Thus conscience does make cowards of us all:  
And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
And enterprises of great pith and moment  
With this regard their currents turn away,  
And lose the name of action."

*Hamlet*  
III. i. 89-94

Unsurprisingly, Hamlet was Freud's favourite work of Shakespeare. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud wrote of *Hamlet* in a famous passage:

"Another of the great creations of tragic poetry, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, has its roots in the same soil as *Oedipus Rex*. But the changed treatment of the same material reveals the whole difference in the mental life of these two widely separated epochs of civilization: the secular advance of repression in the emotional life of mankind. In the *Oedipus* the child's wishful phantasy that underlies it is brought into the open and realized as it would be in a dream. In *Hamlet* it remains repressed; and – just as in the case of a neurosis – we only learn of its existence from its inhibiting consequences. Strangely enough, the overwhelming effect produced by the more modern tragedy has turned out to be compatible with the fact that people have remained completely in the dark as to the hero's character. The play is built up

on Hamlet's hesitations over fulfilling the task of revenge that is assigned to him; but its test offers no reasons or motives for these hesitations and an immense variety of attempts at interpreting them have failed to produce a result. According to the view which was originated by Goethe and is still the prevailing one to-day, Hamlet represents the type of man whose power of direct action is paralysed by an excessive development of his intellect. (He is 'sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought'.) According to another view, the dramatist has tried to portray a pathologically irresolute character which might be classed as neurasthenic. The plot of the drama shows us, however, that Hamlet is far from being represented as a person incapable of taking any action. We see him doing so on two occasions: first in a sudden outburst of temper, when he runs his sword through the eavesdropper behind the arras, and secondly in a premeditated and even crafty fashion, when, with all the callousness of a Renaissance prince, he sends the two courtiers to the death that had been planned for himself. What is it, then, that inhibits him in fulfilling the task set him by his father's ghost? The answer, once again, is that it is the peculiar nature of the task. Hamlet is able to do anything – except take vengeance on the man who did away with his father and took that father's place with his mother, the man who shows him the repressed wishes of his own childhood realized. Thus the loathing which should drive him on to revenge is replaced in him by self-reproaches, by scruples of conscience, which remind him that he himself is literally no better than the sinner whom he is to punish. Here I have translated into conscious terms what was bound to remain unconscious in Hamlet's mind; and if anyone is inclined to call him a hysteric, I can only accept the fact as one that is implied by my interpretation. The distaste for sexuality expressed by Hamlet in his conversation with Ophelia fits in very well with this: the same distaste which was destined to take possession of the poet's mind more and more during the years that followed, and which reached its extreme expression in *Timon of Athens*. For it can of course only be the poet's own mind which confronts us in Hamlet. I observe in a book on Shakespeare by George Brandes (1896) a statement that *Hamlet* was written immediately after the death of Shakespeare's father (in 1601), that is, under the immediate impact of his bereavement and, as we may well assume, while his childhood feelings about his father had been freshly revived. It is known, too, that Shakespeare's own son who died at an early age bore the name of 'Hamnet', which is identical with 'Hamlet'.<sup>1</sup>

Later, in *Dostoevsky and Parricide* (1928) Freud took this theme further:

"It can scarcely be owing to chance that three of the masterpieces of the literature of all time – the *Oedipus Rex* of Sophocles, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* – should all deal with the same subject, parricide. In all three, moreover, the motive for the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Std. Works, Vol.4, 264-266.

deed, sexual rivalry for a woman, is laid bare.”<sup>2</sup>

In *King Lear*, there is much unrecorded history, which attracted Jung’s abiding interest in the folkloric. Jung propounded the collective unconscious: the archetype. In a beautiful passage, Jung had described the mind thus:

“This was the dream. I was in a house I did not know, which had two storeys. It was ‘my house.’ I found myself in the upper storey, where there was a kind of salon furnished with fine old pieces in rococo style. On the walls hung a number of precious old paintings. I wondered that this should be my house, and thought, ‘Not bad.’ But then it occurred to me that I did not know what the lower floor looked like. Descending the stairs, I reached the ground floor. There everything was much older, and I realised that this part of the house must date from about the fifteenth or sixteenth century. The furnishings were medieval; the floors were of red brick. Everywhere it was rather dark. I went from one room to another, thinking, ‘Now I really must explore the whole house.’ I came upon a heavy door, and opened it. Beyond it, I discovered a stone stairway that led down into the cellar. Descending again, I found myself in a beautifully vaulted room which looked exceedingly ancient. Examining the walls, I discovered layers of brick among the ordinary stone blocks, and chips of brick in the mortar. As soon as I saw this I knew that the walls dated from Roman times. My interest by now was intense. I looked more closely at the floor. It was on stone slabs, and in one of these I discovered a ring. When I pulled it, the stone slab lifted, and again I saw a stairway of narrow stone steps leading down into the depths. These, too, I descended, and entered a low cave cut into the rock. Thick dust lay on the floor, and in the dust were scattered bones and broken pottery, like remains of a primitive culture. I discovered two human skulls, obviously very old and half disintegrated. Then I awoke.”<sup>3</sup>

Let us, then, turn to madness in Shakespeare’s great tragedies.

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<sup>2</sup> Dostoevsky and Parricide, Std. Works, Vol.21, 188.

<sup>3</sup> Memories, Dreams, Reflections 182-183.

## II

### MADNESS

Alone of the tragedies, madness is the epicentre of *King Lear*. The climatic storm on the heath is also

“The tempest in my mind”

to use the words of Lear himself (III.iv.14). Lear does not see his own absolutism, born of power and of age; unlike Hamlet and Macbeth he cannot and does not allow reflection and self-doubt; rather, he externalises fault by projecting it to others – expressed in words seared onto our culture’s consciousness, uttered in Act I:

“How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is  
To have a thankless child!”

*King Lear*  
I.iv.297-298

Although Lear does not understand the cause, he understands the consequence. At the end of Act I he exclaims:

“O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!  
Keep me in temper: I would not be mad!”

I.v.34-35

Thus he fights against his emotions. To the cold Regan he says in Act II:

“You think I’ll weep:  
No, I’ll not weep; I have full cause of weeping,  
[Storm and tempest]  
But this heart shall break into a hundred thousand flaws  
Or ere I’ll weep. O fool, I shall go mad!”

II.ii.471-474

By Act III the storm fully breaks and so does Lear’s mind. After his famous storm speech, which I have already quoted (“Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks”) Lear turns from nature to himself:

“My wits begin to turn”

III.ii.66

and then links the two:

“When the mind’s free,  
The body’s delicate: the tempest in my mind  
Doth from my senses take all feeling else  
Save what beats there. Filial ingratitude!”

III.iv.13-16

Too late he sees the danger of recrimination:

“O Regan, Goneril  
Your kind old father, whose frank heart gave all -  
O, that way madness lies: let me shun that:  
No more of that.”

III.iv.23-24

Pride, humiliation, wilfulness, impotence, self-pity and moral blindness have exhausted him. Lear sinks into madness – characterised as always in Shakespeare by speech in prose, not in poetry. In one of Shakespeare’s great paradoxes, the King thereafter speaks gibberish and the Court Fool speaks sanity. Ultimately, a broken Lear reconciles with his daughter Cordelia, who with her husband invades England from France. In the politics of the early seventeenth century in England, it would not have done for Catholic France successfully to invade Protestant England. Cordelia is defeated, and in the final Act Lear comes on stage, his beloved Cordelia dead in his arms, and oscillates between sanity and madness.

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It is not frank madness but heightened imagination and guilt that are the hallmarks of *Macbeth*. *King Lear* is a play about the loss of kingship and the price of loss; *Macbeth* is about the gain of kingship and the price of gain. The pathways of both are psychological.

The three witches, in Act I of *Macbeth*, are both real and imagined. They fire Macbeth’s ambition:

*First Witch:* All hail, Macbeth: hail to thee. Thane of Glamis!  
*Second Witch:* All hail, Macbeth: hail to thee. Thane of Cawdor!  
*Third Witch:* All hail, Macbeth, that shall be king hereafter!"

I.iii.50-52

Macbeth responds:

"Stay, you imperfect creatures. Tell me more"

I.iii.72

and then is lost in contemplation:

"This supernatural soliciting  
Cannot be ill, cannot be good: if ill,  
Why hath it given me earnest of success  
Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.  
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion  
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair  
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs  
Against the use of nature? Present fears  
Are less than horrible imaginings:  
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,  
Shakes so my single state of man  
That function is smothered in surmise,  
And nothing is, but what is not."

I.iii.140-152

Although the three witches have fired Macbeth's ambition, he hesitates. It is his wife who gives him strength, in a passage I have quoted:

*Macbeth:* If we should fail?  
*Lady Macbeth:* We fail?  
But screw your courage to the stitching-place  
And we'll not fail."

I.vii.65-67

So pressed, Macbeth determines to murder the King, his mind heightened:

"Is this a dagger which I see before me,  
The handle toward my hand?"

II.i.40-41

and after the deed:

*Macbeth:* Me though I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more.  
Macbeth does murder sleep': the innocent sleep,  
Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care,  
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,  
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,  
Chief nourisher in life's feast –

*Lady Macbeth:* What do you mean?

*Macbeth:* Still it cried 'Sleep no more' to all the house:  
'Glamis has murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor  
Shall sleep no more. Macbeth shall sleep no more.'"

II.ii.42-52

Macbeth inherits the throne by murdering Duncan. Then, to secure his position, he has Banquo murdered, only to find the ghost of Banquo sitting in the King's seat. But Macbeth, although shaken by this, has commenced to banish guilt and conscience:

*Macbeth:* I am in blood  
Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more,  
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.  
Strange things I have in head, that will to hand,  
Which must be acted ere they may be scanned.

*Lady Macbeth:* You lack the season of all natures, sleep.

*Macbeth:* Come, we'll to sleep. My strange and self-abuse  
Is the initiate fear that wants hard use:  
We are yet but young in deed."

III.iv.157-165

Macbeth goes on to murder and murder, with less and less emotion. In another of Shakespeare's paradoxes, like Lear and the Fool, it is Lady Macbeth who unravels – she who would have "dashed the brains out" of her suckling infant. When Macbeth, after murdering Duncan, hears the voice "Sleep no more", she accused Macbeth of being "brainsickly" and "infirm of purpose" and said

"A little water clears us of this deed".

II.ii.78

However, in a harbinger of what was to come, she also said:

"These deeds must not be thought  
After these ways: so, it will make us mad".

II.ii.40-41.

Ultimately it is she who suffers conscience and then madness. We see little of

this passage until the famous final Act where we see the consequence. Scene I of that Act is in prose, to signify madness. It also signifies Shakespeare's knowledge of medical practice. This is that Scene:

## ACT V

### SCENE I.- *Dunsinane. A room in the castle.*

*Enter a Doctor of Physic and a Waiting-Gentlewoman.*

*Doct.* I have two nights watch'd with you, but can perceive no truth in your report. When was it she last walk'd?

*Gent.* Since his Majesty went into the field, I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her night-gown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon't, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep.

*Doct.* A great perturbation in nature, to receive at once the benefit of sleep, and do the effects of watching! In this slumbery agitation, besides her walking and other actual performances, what, at any time, have you heard her say?

*Gent.* That, Sir, which I will not report after her.

*Doct.* You may, to me; and 'tis most meet you should.

*Gent.* Neither to you, nor any one; having not witness to confirm my speech.

*Enter LADY MACBETH, with a taper.*

Lo you! Here she comes. This is her very guise; and, upon my life, fast asleep. Observe her: stand close.

*Doct.* How came she by that light?

*Gent.* Why, it stood by her: she has light by her continually; 'tis her command.

*Doct.* You see, her eyes are open.

*Gent.* Ay, but their sense are shut.

*Doct.* What is it she does now? Look, how she rubs her hands.

*Gent.* It is an accustom'd action with her, to seem thus washing her hands. I have known her continue in this a quarter of an hour.

*Lady M.* Yet here's a spot.

*Doct.* Hark! She speaks. I will set down what comes from her, to satisfy my remembrance the more strongly.

*Lady M.* Out, damned spot! out, I say! -One; two: why, then 'tis time to do't. -Hell is murky. -Fie, my Lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard? -What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to accompt? -Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?

*Doct.* Do you mark that?

*Lady M.* The Thane of Fife had a wife: where is she now? -What, will these hands ne'er be clean? -No more o' that, my Lord, no more o' that: you mar all with this starting.

*Doct.* Go to, go to: you have known what you should not.

*Gent.* She has spoke what she should not, I am sure of that: Heaven knows what she has known.

*Lady M.* Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. O! O! O!

*Doct.* What a sigh is there! The heart is sorely charg'd.

*Gent.* I would not have such a heart in my bosom, for the dignity of the whole body.

*Doct.* Well, well, well.

*Gent.* Pray God it be, sir.

*Doct.* This disease is beyond my practice: yet I have known those which have walk'd in their sleep, who have died holily in their beds.

*Lady M.* Wash your hands, put on your night-gown; look not so pale. I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried: he cannot come out on's grave.

*Doct.* Even so?

*Lady M.* To bed, to bed: there's knocking at the gate. Come, come, come, come, give me your hand. What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed.  
[*Exeunt.*]

*Doct.* Will she go now to bed?

*Gent.* Directly.

*Doct.* Foul whisp'rings are abroad. Unnatural deeds  
Do breed unnatural troubles: infected minds  
To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets.  
More needs she the divine than the physician.-  
God, God forgive us all! Look after her;  
Remove from her the means of all annoyance,  
And still keep eyes upon her. -So, good night:  
My mind she has mated, and amaz'd my sight.  
I think, but dare not speak.

*Gent.* Good night, good Doctor.

[*Exeunt.*]

It was after Lady Macbeth died by her own hand that Macbeth uttered the soliloquy I have quoted:

“She should have died hereafter:  
There would have been time for such a word”.

V.v.17-19

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*Macbeth* is a play of action and is Shakespeare’s shortest; *Hamlet* is a play of inaction and is Shakespeare’s longest. And by another classic Shakespearean movement, Macbeth’s actions destroy him while Hamlet’s inaction destroys him.

Hamlet never was mad; but he affected it to disguise his contemplation. In a passage redolent with expressions known to millions who have never read Shakespeare, Polonius says to the King and Queen:

“ ... since brevity is the soul of wit,  
And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes,  
I will be brief: your noble son is mad:  
Mad I call it, for to define true madness,  
What is’t but to be nothing else but mad?  
But let that go -

*Gertrude:* More matter, with less art.

*Polonius:* Madam, I swear I use no art at all”.

II.ii.95-102

and later in the same scene when he sees Hamlet affecting madness:

“Though this be madness, yet there is method in’t.”

II.ii.207

In the final Act Hamlet again affected madness as a disguise in order to avenge his father’s murder, a vengeance also much afflicted by indecision. In a passage of relevance to lawyers, Hamlet, in the graveyard examining skulls, says (in prose, thus bespeaking madness):

“*Hamlet:* There’s another: why may not that be the skull of a

lawyer? Where be his quiddities now, his quillies, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks? Why does he suffer this rude knave now to knock him about the sconce with a dirty shovel, and will not tell him of his action of battery? Hum. This fellow might be in's time a great buyer of land, with his statutes, his recognizances, his fines, his double vouchers, his recoveries: is this the fine of his fines and the recovery of his recoveries, to have his fine pate full of fine dirt? Will his vouchers vouch him no more of his purchases, and double ones too, than the length and breadth of a pair of indentures? The very conveyances of his lands will hardly lie in this box; and must the inheritor himself have no more, ha?

*Horatio:* Not a jot more, my lord....

And then:

*First Clown:* Here's a skull now: this skull has lain in the earth three-and-twenty years.

*Hamlet:* Whose was it?

*First Clown:* A whoreson mad fellow's it was: whose do you think it was?

*Hamlet:* Nay, I know not.

*First Clown:* A pestilence on him for a mad rogue! A poured a flagon of Rhenish on my head once. This same skull, sir, this same skull, sir, was Yorick's skull, the king's jester.

*Hamlet:* This?

*First Clown:* E'en that.

*Hamlet:* Let me see. – Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio: a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath borne me on his back a thousand times – and how abhorred my imagination is! My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. – Where be your gibes now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar? No one now to mock your own jeering? Quite chop-fallen? Now get you to my lady's chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come. Make her laugh at that."

*Hamlet*  
V.i.132-148.

It was not Hamlet but his lover, Ophelia, who went mad and died; and at the time, unknown to Hamlet, Ophelia's body in funeral train was being brought to the graveyard.

In the paradigm soliloquy of indecision, Hamlet contemplates suicide:

“To be, or not to be, that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And by opposing end them? To die, to sleep –  
No more – and by a sleep to say we end  
The heartache and the thousand natural shocks  
That flesh is heir to: 'tis a consummation  
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep:  
To sleep, perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub.  
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause: there's the respect  
That makes calamity of so long life,  
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,  
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,  
The pangs of disprized love, the law's delay,  
The insolence of office and the spurns  
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,  
When he himself might his quietus make  
With a bare bodkin? Who would these fardels bear,  
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,  
But that the dread of something after death,  
The undiscovered country from whose bourn  
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
Than fly to others that we know not of?  
Thus conscience does makes cowards of us all:  
And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
And enterprises of great pith and moment  
With this regard their currents turn away,  
And lose the name of action.”

*Hamlet*  
III. i. 62-94

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There is, I consider, no madness in *Othello*. Jealousy is no pathology justifying

killing. It is profoundly disturbing that, albeit in 1904, Professor A.C. Bradley, Professor of Poetry at the University of Oxford, a Doctor of Laws and a Doctor of Letters, and a much admired scholar of Shakespeare, felt able to write this:

“The Othello who enters the bed-chamber with the words,

‘ It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul,’

is not the man of the Fourth Act. The deed he is bound to do is no murder, but a sacrifice. He is to save Desdemona from herself, not in hate but in honour; in honour, and also in love. His anger has passed; a boundless sorrow has taken its place; and

‘this sorrow’s heavenly:  
It strikes where it doth love.’

Even when, at the sight of her apparent obduracy, and at the hearing of the words which by a crowning fatality can only re-convince him of her guilt, these feelings give way to others, it is to righteous indignation they give way, not to rage; and, terribly painful as this scene is, there is almost nothing here to diminish the admiration and love which heighten pity. And pity itself vanishes, and love and admiration alone remain, in the majestic dignity and sovereign ascendancy of the close. Chaos has come and gone; and the Othello of the Council-chamber and the quay of Cyprus has returned, or a greater and nobler Othello still. As he speaks those final words in which all the glory and agony of his life - long ago in India and Arabia and Aleppo, and afterwards in Venice, and now in Cyprus - seem to pass before us, like the pictures that flash before the eyes of a drowning man, a triumphant scorn for the fetters of the flesh and the littleness of all the lives that must survive him sweeps our grief away, and when he dies upon a kiss the most painful of all tragedies leaves us for the moment free from pain, and exulting in the power of ‘love and man’s unconquerable mind’.”<sup>4</sup>

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This is but a brief review of madness in Shakespeare’s great tragedies. In them Shakespeare comprehends with a poet’s vision the great themes of life and death. The plays are both universal and immediate. Shakespeare was a favourite of royalty; King James gave Shakespeare’s acting company, formerly the Chamberlain’s Men, the title The King’s Men, and many of the plays were

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<sup>4</sup> A.C. Bradley *Shakespearean Tragedy* 161 (London, 1963 edition).

performed at Whitehall or at royal events. Shakespeare himself often took small parts in his plays, although not as miniscule as did Alfred Hitchcock in his films. One of Shakespeare's favourite parts was the ghost of Hamlet's father.

Shakespeare was not recording case histories, and his characters cannot be treated as case studies: he was writing plays, in the confines of five Acts and to be performed before audiences, all in the context of the times, notably the hegemony of the Tudor dynasty and the accession in 1603 of James VI of Scotland as James I of England. Dr Lush will consider, in the light of contemporary psychiatric knowledge, the states revealed by our leading characters. I am sure that her commentary will be of great interest.

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### III

#### AUTHORSHIP

Finally, a note on authorship.

Fifteen of Shakespeare's plays have an Italian setting or background. Was Shakespeare Italian? Dr Martino Iuvara, of Sicily, in 2000 claimed so. He says that Shakespeare was born in Messina in 1564 as Michaelangelo Florio Crollanza to Dr Giovanni Florio and a noblewoman Gughelma Crollanza, and was educated by Franciscan monks in Latin, Greek and History; that the family fled the Inquisition, travelling first to Treviso, near Venice, and there purchased Casa Otello, built by a retired Venetian mercenary named Otello who was said to have killed his wife out of misplaced jealousy; that Michaelangelo then studied in Venice, Padua and Mantua, and travelled to Denmark; came to England in 1588 aged 24; had a second cousin on his mother's side who lived in Stratford and who took him in; that the cousin's family had Anglicised its name to Shakespeare, which was its approximate English translation; and thus we have the author of our plays.

If that seems fantastical, consider this. Stratford was never mentioned in any of Shakespeare's plays; but St Albans was, fifteen times. Francis Bacon became Viscount St Albans. Was Shakespeare really Bacon? In an analysis worthy of *The Da Vinci Code*, Sir Edwin Durning-Lawrence, in *Bacon is Shakespeare* (1910), analysed for posterity the word 'honorificabilitudinitatibus' found in *Love's Labour Lost*<sup>5</sup>. Sir Edwin stated that that word was a derivative of the Latin hexameter "Hi ludi F. Baconis nati tuiti orbi", translated as "These plays, F.Bacon's offspring, are preserved for the world".

Shakespeare's knowledge of the law was so precise that often it has been said that a lawyer wrote his plays. The then Lord Chief Justice, Lord Campbell,

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<sup>5</sup> V.i.30 (Costard to Moth):  
"O, they have lived long on the alms-basket of words. I marvel thy master hath not eaten thee for a word, for thou art not so long by the head as *honorificabilitudinitatibus*".

aged 80, took his summer vacation in August 1858 and during it wrote a knowledgeable and precise work *Shakespeare's Legal Acquirements Considered* (1859). In it his Lordship collated the many references to the law by Shakespeare and stated:

“Having concluded my examination of Shakespeare’s judicial phrases and forensic allusions – on the retrospect I am amazed, not only by the number, but by the accuracy and propriety with which they are uniformly introduced.”<sup>6</sup>

However, ultimately his Lordship reached no firm conclusion on whether Shakespeare had legal training.

The author of the plays and poems was not Francis Bacon, knighted in 1603, Attorney General from 1613 and Lord Chancellor from 1618: Bacon eschewed the theatre, which he considered to be frivolous and seductive. Nor Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford: a person of overweening vanity who would not have hidden his identity. Nor Christopher Marlowe: a poet of great capacity, but dead by 1593. Nor Fulke Greville, a minor poet and relative of Shakespeare whose capacity fell far below Shakespeare’s: although even this year in England, following radar penetration of Greville’s sarcophagus, application has been made to Dioscescan authorities in Warwick to search the sarcophagus by video camera to seek texts by Greville said to be his writing of the plays. Dr William Leahy, head of Shakespeare authorship studies at Brunel University, has said that such claims are “interesting but bordering on the cranky”. Shakespeare was an actor, producer and owner. Shakespeare’s plays were collected by his contemporary actors and published in the famous First Folio in 1623, but seven years after Shakespeare’s death. It would have required a conspiracy of great proportion for Shakespeare’s contemporary actors and writers to have suppressed the true author of the plays.

It was Shakespeare who wrote his plays and poems. His mind is informed, capacious and sublime; and importantly is a poet’s mind – the greatest of English literature, as Dante’s is of Italian literature and Homer’s of Greek. The only more

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<sup>6</sup> At 107.

informed, capacious and sublime mind the world has seen is that of the ultimate polymath, Leonardo da Vinci.

I commend Shakespeare to you.

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[Citations are from the *Complete Works* published by the Royal Shakespeare Society in 2007 – the first full edition of the First Folio in three hundred years].  
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