

Université de Montréal

“Document[s] in Madness”: Female Mental (Dis)abilities in Hamlet and The Changeling

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Résumé

Mon mémoire de recherche porte sur les représentations sur scène des différents types de folie féminine se retrouvant dans les pièces *Hamlet* de William Shakespeare et *The Changeling* de Thomas Middleton et William Rowley. Ceci est principalement réalisé par la rencontre de notions comme le genre, le corps féminin et les espaces domestiques. Dans mon analyse, je me base sur les conceptions de la folie qui prévalaient durant la Renaissance, en tandem avec les connaissances actuelles sur les traumatismes et les troubles mentaux. J'ai considéré dans ce mémoire la folie des personnages, simulée ou réelle, comme des formes d'(in)capacité mentale. Ce mémoire offre donc un point de vue nouveau sur la perception de la détresse féminine au début de l'époque moderne. Divisé en deux chapitres, le premier traite des causes engendrant le passage de la psyché d'Ophélie d'un état de lucidité à un état de folie, en mettant l'accent sur l'effet de sa jeunesse sur sa santé mentale. Le second chapitre s'intéresse aux états mentaux d'Isabella et de Beatrice-Joanna, respectivement, à travers l'intégration de concepts comme les troubles mentaux forgés, le ravissement et les traumatismes. Il est à mentionner à propos de cette démarche que ces personnages brouillent les distinctions entre la lucidité et la folie.

Mots-clés : folie, troubles mentaux, détresse, traumatisme, espace domestique, corps féminin, chasteté, genre, Renaissance

Abstract

My thesis examines the on-stage manifestations of the different types of female madness presented in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling*. This is mainly accomplished through the exploration of the interwoven relations between notions such as gender, the female body, and domestic spaces. In my analysis, I primarily draw on the Renaissance understanding of madness in tandem with modern trauma and disability theories. I read the madness of these characters, feigned and real, as forms of mental (dis)ability. This thesis thus offers novel insights on the perception of early modern female distraction. Divided into two chapters, the first deals with the causes engendering the metamorphosis of Ophelia's psyche from a state of sanity into a state of madness, placing emphasis on the effect of her youth on her mental transition. The second explores Isabella and Beatrice-Joanna's mental dispositions, respectively, through the incorporation of concepts such as dissembled disability, ravishment, and trauma. In this endeavor it is noteworthy that these characters blur the lines between sanity and madness.

Keywords: madness, mental disability, distraction, trauma, domestic space, the female body, chastity, gender, Renaissance

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Introduction: Madness in Renaissance Drama

Madness pervades the drama of the early modern period, especially the tragic plays of the sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries. Indeed, it has often been employed by playwrights for a variety of literary purposes and in a multiplicity of forms and manifestations. However, despite its ample presence in Renaissance drama, madness escapes a precise and explicit definition;¹ its meaning usually depends on the manner through which it is displayed and perceived on and off stage. Moreover, characters that are categorized as mad often portray an ambiguous and non-normative state of being, which generally disrupts the conventional and socially acceptable modes of conduct.

The concept of madness is open to a variety of interpretations. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, madness can be defined as “insanity; mental illness or impairment, esp. of a severe kind; (later esp.) psychosis” (OED 2).² Duncan Salkeld notes that the term is invoked in early modern English literature through a variety of cognates that generally denote similar conditions. He presents terms such as “folly,” “frenzy,” “fury,” “frantic” and “imagination” as examples, noting that their origins derive essentially from Classical tragedy (27). This view is validated by Carol Thomas Neely, who points out that “‘madness’ is not a unified or especially validated term during the Renaissance; it is only one (not particularly common) word among the many that denote mental distress” (1). Moreover, an emphasis is placed on Renaissance medicinal

¹ Sonya Freeman Loftis in her article “Mental Health Issues: Madness in the Renaissance” notes that madness was a “very vaguely defined term” and that the words that were used with it interchangeably were “extremely imprecise” during the early modern period. (153)

² I use the term insanity in my thesis synonymously with mad in accordance with Michael Macdonald’s use of the term.

discourses as they explain and describe madness through reference to humoral theories, highlighting in the process the intertwined relation between the body, mind, and mental health (Salkeld 61). Indeed, “the afflicted body and soul cannot be kept distinct because they are inseparable [...] hence each influences the other’s disease” (Neely 15). This understanding of madness as a broad and ambiguous concept that encompasses a variety of connotations unravels various possibilities concerning its perception as a mental illness.

The incorporation of the notion of madness in early modern literary discourses has enabled playwrights to reexamine and put into question some culturally predetermined notions. Indeed, its theatrical implementation ignited a “reconceptualization” of the borders between “masculinity and femininity, body and mind, [and] feigned and actual distraction” (Neely 2). A brief clarification of the term distraction is perhaps required. According to Neely, the term was used during the Renaissance to describe the way “early modern subjects felt when mad; [...] it emphasizes that there are multiple signifiers for conditions of mental disturbance” (Neely 2). Hence, distraction is very close in meaning to madness as one term usually invokes the other.³ Neely maintains, as argued by Roy Porter, that the different adjectives denoting states of early modern mental illnesses such as “‘lovesick,’ ‘troubled-in-mind,’ ‘idle-headed,’ ‘melancholic,’ ‘lunatic,’ ‘frenzied,’ ‘mad’- ‘distract’ (or ‘distraught’ or ‘distract’)” (3) overlap in meaning as they refer to temporary ailments and conditions. Indeed, distraction places emphasis on the sufferers’ mental distress, highlighting in the process the common perception that they are “divided, diverted, disassembled-as beside themselves-temporarily” (Neely 3). Interestingly, however, madness and its signification differed in its on-stage manifestations depending on the character’s gender and their social positioning.

³ Neely employs distraction as an umbrella term for all the types of mental distress. However, since the term during the Renaissance was used as a near synonym to madness, I employ both terms interchangeably in my thesis.

Plays such as William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1603) and Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling* (1622) are prime examples that demonstrate the various perspectives through which madness can be represented on stage. *Hamlet* is a revenge tragedy whose melancholic protagonist Hamlet, prince of Denmark, feigns madness as a tool to uncover the truth behind his father's death and to avenge his "foul and most unnatural murder" (Shakespeare 1.5.25). However, several court members are negatively affected by the prince's unstable state of mind and incomprehensible paradoxical (in)action. One of these victims is Ophelia, *Hamlet's* sole young female character and one of Shakespeare's most eminent maiden figures, who descends into madness which presumably leads to her death. *The Changeling*, on the other hand, presents madness from a different perspective. The plays' two plots display characters who either suffer from real mental distraction or feign it as a defense-mechanism, a tool that enables them to transform their social personas and unshackle cultural rules and expectations. In fact, the main plot revolves around Beatrice-Joanna, commonly perceived as a villain-heroine, and her fall from grace as she struggles with societal restrictions and male authority, in pursuit of her desire to marry Alsemero. In the sub-plot Isabella, confined by her husband in his mental asylum, feigns madness as a tool for self-protection from the implicit and explicit sexual harassment of the madhouse's occupants. Both characters at certain points in the play blur the lines between sanity and madness.

Ophelia has fascinated and intrigued critics, artists, and audiences alike through her image as the virtuously *naïve* and elegantly entrancing self-destructive lady. She has essentially been viewed as the epitome of the feminine suicidal figure in literary works; her iconic death has been illustrated through a variety of art forms with the most famous example perhaps being John Everett Millais' detailed painting of her aesthetically drowned figure surrounded by flowers. In recent decades, research has shifted its focus from Ophelia's role as a shadow figure to the prince of

Denmark,⁴ with her story being the "repressed story of Hamlet" (Showalter 79), into perceiving her character as standing on its own. For example, Caroline Bicks views Ophelia as an "agent of remembrance" (154), who voices the repressed accounts of the English Catholic communities, emphasizing her capability of a "particular kind of memory-work and testimony" (149). Further, Barbara Smith argues that "Ophelia's suicide is a sad but credible response by her own impaired psyche" (110), whereas Neely points out that "the context of her disease [...] is sexual frustration, social helplessness, and enforced control over women's bodies" (52). Interestingly, there is barely any research that looks at Ophelia from the perspective of a domestic trauma victim, whose adolescence and distressing experiences have led to the manifestation of her mental disability.

The majority of the research produced on *The Changeling* has chiefly focused on the main plot. The subplot, in terms of theatrical representation and literary analysis, has for the most part either been overshadowed by the main plot, considered "as some sort of adjunct to the play — possibly not irrelevant, but not essential," (Daalder 1) or simply overlooked by critics for its controversial treatment and representation of those who are deemed as "fools" or "mad" persons. In fact, only in recent decades has the subplot been considered for its own peculiar treatment of madness. Further, Isabella's character has often been viewed as foil to Beatrice-Joanna; she has scarcely been investigated separately as a similarly complex character. For instance, Daalder declares that "compared with the people around her, Beatrice is mad. She stands out most against Isabella," (7) and Deborah G. Burks asserts that "Isabella's chastity [functions] as a counterexample to Beatrice-Joanna's falseness" (778). On the other hand, Beatrice-Joanna's peculiar persona, although it has often intrigued critics and audiences, has mostly been read through judgmental eyes. For example, Irving Ribner argues, in his *Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order words*,

⁴ See Wagner "Ophelia: Shakespeare's Pathetic Plot Device" (1963)

that the play deals with Beatrice-Joanna's coming "to recognize and accept the evil which has always been a part of her. [...] She stands for an evil hidden from the world as it is hidden from herself" (125). Other critics have varying understandings of Beatrice-Joanna's character. For instance, Arthur L. Little Jr., in his article "'Transshaped' women: virginity and hysteria in *The Changeling*," reads Beatrice-Joanna as a hysterical woman.⁵ Hence, due to the vast emphasis on the sub-plot's reflection of the main plot, I aim in my analysis to discuss the mental dispositions of both female protagonists separately, and not as foil to each other. Indeed, I believe that both can exist independently as two individually unique and intriguing cases of on-stage mental (dis)ability. My research departs from most critiques as it does not aim to decipher whether Beatrice-Joanna is a villain or a heroine. Indeed, I simply seek to analyze her identity and psychological state in light of the events she experiences, concluding in the process that her sexual harassment has caused her traumatic reactions. She, thus, obscures the lines between madness and sanity.

With the emergence of distinct innovative fields of disability studies, I believe it possible to perceive both plays from new underexplored scopes of analysis. Allison P. Hobgood and David H. Wood indicate, in their book *Recovering Disability in Early Modern England*, that there have been extensive studies directed towards the exploration of "early modern selfhood" through various arrays of identitary research, encompassing class, race, gender and ethnic studies. However, the interest in disability and "disabled selfhoods" (11) in Renaissance England has only recently started igniting critical interest and scholarly engagement. This exclusion, hence, problematizes the issue of "representation of non-normativity in the Renaissance" (3) especially when taking into

⁵ Little employs the 18th century notion of hysteria in his analysis

consideration that the representation of non-normative bodies and minds are prominent in the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As Lindsey Row-Heyveld's remarks

few scholars have situated early modern mental impairment within the context of disability, and, especially strangely, in spite of the fact that it was emerging as a distinct legal and social category in the unfolding English Reformation. Neither have scholars reconsidered the role of mental and intellectual disabilities within the tradition of revenge tragedy. (73-74)

Indeed, despite the innovative research that perceives madness as a form of disability in literary productions, Renaissance madness remains under-investigated from this scope despite its central role as an essential trope in the literature of the time. In fact, even works such as Hobgood and Wood's, which aim to "recover disability in early modern England," cannot encompass the amplitude of this topic. Hence, it is inevitable that recent works neglect and overlook the representation of female mental disability in Renaissance literature.

The drama of the early modern period presents diverse manifestations of mentally (dis)abled female characters. Ophelia, Isabella, and Beatrice-Joanna all suffer from different types of mental distraction, feigned or real. Their mental states manifest as the outcome of a variety of circumstances revolving mainly around social restrictions, emotional restraint (or lack off), perceptions of their bodies, spaces they inhabit, and traumatic experiences they undergo. One ought to bear in mind, as noted by Row-Heyveld, that the prevailing "pre-Cartesian worldview" did not acknowledge an "absolute mind-body separation" (20) The boundaries that contemporary distinctions have set between physical and mental disabilities were not established in the cultural imagination of the Renaissance. Indeed, these boundaries were blurred, which necessitates the

incorporation of mental and physical impairments in the “the category of early modern disability” (20). Row-Heyveld also emphasizes that despite the differences in the historical understanding of these impairments,

research increasingly identifies terms such as “madness,” “foolishness,” and “idiocy” as disabilities, while also accounting for the period-specific and transhistorical fluidity of terms in relationship to modern fixations on definition and diagnosis. [... These] conditions qualify as disabilities in the emerging legal definitions that identified madness and foolishness as ailments rendering one incapable of work, grouping them with impairments like deafness, blindness, lameness, and so on. (20-21)

This view is consolidated by Noam Ostrander and Bruce Henderson, co-editors of *Disability Studies Quarterly*, who assert that recent theoretical scholarly work on madness “draw[s] heavily on Disability Studies to trouble the borders of normal/abnormal and sane/insane” (1). Hence, following these perspectives on the relation between madness and disability, I will be exploring female madness in *Hamlet* and *The Changeling* as a form of mental disability.

Bearing in mind that intellectual and mental disability are modern terms, which would have not been identifiable during the Renaissance, I will be employing them interchangeably with early modern terminologies such as madness. Moreover, it is worth noting that the purpose of disability studies, through its focus on “non-normativity,” is to debunk the incessant necessity for “ability” as well as to challenge the common perceptions of the “non-normative.” It also unravels the way “‘insufficient’ bodies and persons, paradoxically, are made less visible the more they demand notice” (Wood and Hobgood 3). This becomes evident when perceiving the effect mental (dis)ability has on the on-stage and off-stage perceptions of the female characters of both plays.

Another theory, which part of my research will rely upon, is trauma theory. Indeed, I refer to some of its elements in an attempt to analyze and gain deeper insight into the behavior of the mentally (dis)abled female characters in both plays. It is important to note that the majority of trauma studies

take as their focus our modern age, and scholars of trauma are quick to point to the phenomenon as uniquely modern [...] trauma theory—both individual and collective—has been heavily shaped by responses to modern catastrophes, which has served to prevent or problematize its application to earlier periods. (Peters and Richards 2)

However, although there has scarcely been an attempt to explore the manifestation of trauma in pre-modern experiences, I contend, in accordance with Peters' and Richards' views, that “psychological trauma as a result of distressing or disturbing experiences is a human response, and evidence of this phenomenon can be found across times and cultures that predate our modern world” (18). Hence, despite it being employed mainly for post-modern readings of war narratives, I maintain, in accordance with Patricia A. Cahill's acknowledgment, that the purpose of my analysis is not to “conflate the traumas of one period with those of another.” Rather the types of domestic Elizabethan trauma should be “recognized as *sui generis*” (137). Nonetheless, I aim to bring into discussion the old and the new with the objective of deciphering and understanding early modern selfhood from a different scope of analysis, “especially in an era when the stage showed very little interest in character in the novelistic sense” (137). Hence, in my investigation of the mental dispositions of the female characters in *Hamlet* and *The Changeling*, I attempt to employ trauma theory to demonstrate the effect distressing experience can have on their psyches as well as their self-perceptions.

This thesis explores the intertwined relation between madness, gender, the female body, and domestic spaces through the exploration of the manifestation of the different forms of on-stage female madness(es) —mental (dis)abiliti(ies)— displayed in *Hamlet* and *The Changeling*. My analysis of the mental dispositions of the three female protagonists, Ophelia, Isabella, and Beatrice-Joanna, essentially draws on disability, feminist, and trauma theories. It also relies on the early modern historical conception of the notion of madness (mental disorders) in relation to the socio-spatial positioning of women during the era. In the first chapter, I explore the causes leading to Ophelia's transition from sanity to madness through the analysis of the socio-psychological circumstances engendering that transformation; trauma theory as well as disability theory constitute the theoretical basis for this chapter. Moreover, attention is accorded to the impact of Ophelia's youth on the developing of her state of madness. The second chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, I explore the concept of female dissembled disability through the examination of Isabella's character. I also investigate the possibility of her blurring the lines of (in)sanity. In the second part, however, I focus on the mental disposition of Beatrice-Joanna and the manner through which she obscures the lines between madness and reason. The aim of my thesis is thus to present some alternative possibilities for perceiving and understanding female madness in Renaissance drama, perhaps mainly as an outcome of domestic, gendered, and traumatic experiences.

Chapter 1 – Probing Ophelia’s Insanity

Ophelia’s ‘fame’ has often veiled the complexity of her character, especially considering all the attention posited on either her innocent image, her madness, or her theatrical importance. Yet despite being the subject of numerous literary and psychological critiques, Ophelia’s character has scarcely been analyzed from the perspective of an early modern female youth, whose traumatic experiences have led to the formation of a seemingly fatal mental disability, which would have been identified at the time as a form of mental distraction. The aim of this chapter is, thus, to explore the reasons leading to Ophelia’s mental metamorphosis, from rationality into madness, as well as to analyze the manifestation of that mental unraveling on stage. Hence, the first part presents an analysis of the character’s mental state through the study of the interlaced relation between her private and public self in conjunction with the other characters, as well as in relation to the environment in which they coexist. It also places emphasis on the effect of youth and adolescence on the cognitive formation of her psyche. The second part, on the other hand, focuses on the character’s psychological transition into a state of madness. It consists mainly of an investigation of the causes leading to her psychological transformation based on trauma theory in tandem with disability theory.

Ophelia is portrayed, from the perspective of the other characters, in the image of the ideal Renaissance lady: a chaste, obedient, virtuous, well-behaved, and self-sacrificing daughter, sister, and lover. Indeed, for Laertes, she represents the perfect sweet “dear maid, [and] kind sister” (4.5.157), whereas for Polonius, she is a submissive daughter, who, in “her duty and obedience” (2.2.107), declines Hamlet’s love letters and “denied/ his access to [her]” (2.1. 109-110). During her first on-stage introduction, in 1.3, she is bidding her brother Laertes farewell on his upcoming

trip. The audience witnesses the latter's constant glorification of Ophelia's virtuous character. In fact, their 'conversation' mainly revolves around Laertes lecturing his sister on the appropriate behavior she ought to display *vis à vis* Hamlet's courting attempts. Her brother ceaselessly 'advises' her to guard her chastity and "honour" from Hamlet's "unmaster'd importunity" and to "fear it," for according to Laertes "the charest maid is prodigal enough/ if she unmask her beauty to the moon" (1.3. 32, 33, 36-37). She is warned to fear Hamlet, or at least his "youthful" intentions, as he constitutes a threat to her chaste identity. Furthermore, she is instructed to "lock herself from [Hamlet's] resort, / admit no messengers, receive no tokens" (2.2.143-144). Hence, from the onset, it is noticeable that the environment Ophelia inhabits is not only rife with trepidations and apprehensions, which restrain her character, but it additionally casts her merely into the societal stock figure of the chaste maid. She must unquestionably follow male authority and preserve her purity and innocence, efforts of suppression that distort her subjectivity and compromise her selfhood, all for the sake of safeguarding her public image. This restraining environment, built on emotional and sexual repression, additionally leads to the character's social and mental isolation.

Ophelia is chiefly presented in social settings, constantly surrounded by, and interacting with other characters; she is never on stage alone and is almost never allowed the freedom of a single utterance in private. Yet despite her copious social interactions, it is noticeable that she rarely expresses her personal opinions or emotions. She is continuously given instructions, taught how to behave, and 'advised' as to when and with whom to interact. "The men who do put words in her mouth have little understanding of her feelings and needs. They give her orders, dismiss her protests, insult, or condescend. Each attempt to make her conform to some feminine stereotype that reflects well on his 'honor.' Each betrays her" (Hamilton 80). In a sense, her private self is a mere silhouette, the details of which are overshadowed by a seemingly submissive public *façade*. In

other words, her individuality is suppressed by a public persona that, instead of asserting her agency, pushes her to the periphery of the court's social *milieu*, leaving her in a state of self-consuming solitude. In her essay "Ophelia's Loneliness," Amelia Worsley argues that although Hamlet is "the theatre's most well-known solitary," the notion of "'loneliness' is more apt to describe Ophelia than Hamlet, despite the similarity of their situations, because she remains silent" (521). The prince manages to conjure up an audience through speaking his soliloquies and monologues unlike Ophelia, whose innermost feelings are unbeknownst to the public (524). Hence, despite continuously being in the presence of other persons, Ophelia ironically suffers from a state of mental and emotional isolation, mainly noticeable through her seldomly voiced thoughts.

Neither the characters nor the audience are granted access to Ophelia's discreetly veiled inner disposition. In this regard, Worsley remarks that Ophelia does not articulate her state of mental isolation, unlike Hamlet. Her silence prevents the spectators "access to what she is (or is not) thinking." Thus, her "reticence" could be perceived simultaneously as an indication of oppression and/or obedience as well as an "act of defiance, a willed refusal of theatrical tradition" (525). Her ability to withhold and suppress language renders ambiguous the relation between her inner self and outer appearance. "She absents herself from the tradition of verbally drawing attention to the disjunction between what she feels and what she says to other characters" (525). Taking into consideration that Ophelia's emotional restraint and mental ambiguity beget an unattainable inner disposition, it is possible to assume that her loneliness could have its negative effects on the character's psyche. It thus can be perceived as an initial source for her distress.

Ophelia not only finds herself entrapped by social roles and expectations, but she is also unable to express or pronounce her loneliness. In her article "Hearing Ophelia: Gender and Tragic Discourse in 'Hamlet,'" Sandra K. Fischer notes that

Ophelia's utterances are never allowed free, natural flow; her truncated responses, her uncertain assertions, her conflicting loyalties irrevocably tied to a self-image that tries to accommodate her closest males' expectations - all are determined by external pressures. Hearing Ophelia, one senses continual psycholinguistic frustration: she knows not what to think, nor how to allow language either a cognitive or a therapeutic function. (3)

Despite Fischer's assertion that Ophelia's speech demonstrates a "psycholinguistic frustration" due to her inability of sound reasoning —not knowing what to think—, I argue that her state of "psycholinguistic frustrations" stems rather from her deep awareness and understanding of the precepts of the patriarchal environment she inhabits as well as the power language possesses in such an environment. Indeed, despite being in a strict and isolating milieu, on the rare occasions she expresses her viewpoints, Ophelia demonstrates a nimble mind and sharp wit. For example, in the previously mentioned scene with her brother, 1.3, she retorts that while she will heed his advice, he should not

As some ungracious pastors do,

Show [her] the steep and thorny way to heaven

Whiles, like a puffed and reckless libertine,

Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads

And recks not his own rede. (Shakespeare 1.3.47-51)

This statement is crucial to the understanding of Ophelia's character. She is portrayed as the epitome of filial piety, yet she paradoxically displays a subtle resistance to societal restrictions. Indeed, on the one hand, she obeys her father's orders, respects her brother's advice, and adheres

to the social roles expected of her as a lord's daughter. On the other hand, she is ready to express her opinion through witty metaphors that function as social and religious commentaries. Her subtle criticism of the patriarchal double standards that pervade her society are pronounced in her state of sanity. Hence, "the brainwork in which she engages [...] puts her mind on a par with Prince Hamlet" (Bicks 150). It is more probable thus to argue that Ophelia knows what to think, she merely chooses not to express it as she is deeply aware of her socially disadvantageous position.

To further support this point, one ought to take into consideration Ophelia's withdrawal from confrontational interactions. Indeed, statements such as "I do not know, my lord, what I should think" (1.3.104) and "I think nothing, my lord" (3.2.113) demonstrate her amenability to patriarchal rules, which can also be read as subtle expressions of emotional suppression. It is worth noting that the former statement is Ophelia's response to her father's rhetorical question as to whether she trusted Hamlet's "tenders." Interestingly, Ophelia has been present during Polonius' "precepts" to his son Laertes to

... Give thy thoughts no tongue,

Nor any unproportion'd thought his act.

[...]

Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice;

Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgement. (1.3. 59-69)

It is notable that Ophelia acts in accordance with this advice and upholds it almost as conviction. Indeed, a shift in her attitude is perceivable, following this instance, as she accords her thoughts no tongue, refrains from pronouncing her opinions, and settles for the 'simple' answer: "I do not know,

my lord, what I should think” (1.3.104). Hence, Shakespeare creates a complex and intricate character that manages to subtly disrupt the power dynamics merely through her capacity to hold her tongue and to keep her inner thoughts close to her heart. The ambiguity of Ophelia’s frame of mind renders her a puzzling character as one can only speculate about her thoughts and opinions. Accordingly, what many have considered a portrayal of her ‘inability to think’ can be perceived in a different light: a self-defense mechanism to ensure self-preservation in a socially repressing environment, especially when bearing in mind her tender age.

A substantial component, which ought to be taken into consideration when attempting to decipher the complexities of Ophelia’s identity, is her youth. Despite her age not being disclosed in the play, when compared to other young Shakespearean heroines such as Juliet (*Romeo and Juliet*), Cordelia (*King Lear*), Hermia, and Helena (*A Midsummer night’s dream*) an argument can be made that Ophelia is most probably an adolescent. Indeed, the manner through which her father, brother, and even Hamlet treat and describe her demonstrates the character’s youthfulness. For example, Polonius states that she “speak[s] like a green girl, / Unsifted in such perilous circumstances” (1.3.101-2). This statement underscores Ophelia’s juvenility as the word “green” during the early modern period symbolized “youth and inexperience” (Potter et al 380). Additionally, the term is reminiscent of the green-sickness, a condition that adolescent girls going through puberty were thought to suffer from. In fact, by the beginning of the 17th century, “green-sickness had well and truly infiltrated popular culture, literature and the public stage, where it was used by dramatists to focus public attention on the processes of puberty on the young female body as it reaches sexual maturity” (Potter et al 381). The process of female maturation has often been linked with sexual development, especially considering that during this period the mind and body dichotomy was not acknowledged. However, unlike male youth, whose adolescence has been

accorded significant critical visibility on account of the “institutional or corporate dimension” they were granted, female youth’s experiences were “largely domestic, if not necessarily private” (Cohen and Reeves 12). Hence, bearing in mind Kate Chedgoy’s remark that “adolescence is a site where the gendering of childhood comes into particularly clear focus” (23), it is useful to investigate to the early modern period’s common understanding of female youth and adolescence for a clearer grasp of Ophelia’s character.

Despite the widespread critical view that early modern females transitioned swiftly from childhood into adulthood, Elizabeth S. Cohen and Margaret Reeves,⁶ have come to the conclusion that

female youth [w]as a time of multiple and critical transitions. [...] All young women went through a series of functional changes that altered their physical capacities and social identities, and prepared them to take on varied adult roles. [...] maturity required teenage girls to become familiar with altered bodies that brought new powers and new risks. (26)

Thus, being an adolescent places Ophelia in a transitional stage; she is no longer a child but is also not yet a woman (a wife). Ergo, she is in an in-between state, ‘unripe.’ This maturing position indicates that Ophelia’s greenness is bound to influence not only her social positioning and the manner through which she interacts with court members, but also her sense of identity, especially regarding an altering (un)familiar body image. Hence, her social roles are shifting and so is her sense of selfhood.

⁶ See their anthology *The Youth of Early Modern Women* for an extensive study on the subject of female youth during the Renaissance.

Despite enjoying a certain degree of independence in their interactions with men, young women were faced with social pressures stemming from prejudices and marital expectations, mainly in terms of their sexuality and sexual practices, which were originally directed towards married women. According to Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, these social expectations were essentially founded on the notion historians refer to as the “‘double standard’, whereby breaches of the moral code, especially in the form of adultery, were more seriously regarded in the female than in the male” (202). Additionally, courting practices varied depending on the sexes. “Young men exercised greater freedom of action than their female counterparts, who were sometimes subject to constraints especially by family and kin” (202). From this perspective, an argument can be made that Ophelia’s state of mental isolation and “psycholinguistic frustration” probably emanates from emotional and intellectual repression. It is not that she cannot speak her mind, as she has shown on different occasions her deep understanding of the ‘double standardness’ of the world she inhabits, but rather that she has been preconditioned to suppress her thoughts and opinions. Perhaps this is the reason behind hearing “only fragments of her cogitations” when listening to her utterances (Bicks 148). Whereas Hamlet has the luxury of freely expressing his mind due to his antic disposition, Ophelia has to be careful in her interactions. She exists in a stifling environment that has preconditioned her to act and speak in a self-restrictive manner.

At such a young transformative age, Ophelia not only has to maneuver through life at court, which places emotional strain on her psyche, she must also confront a series of mentally distressing events. For instance, Hamlet’s feigned madness and his unusually intimidating and strange behavior intensify Ophelia’s mental distress and ignite in her feelings of fright and unease. In 2.1, she confronts her father about her unsettling encounter with the prince, while emphasizing the effect Hamlet’s bizarre appearance and uncustomary conduct have had on her. She discloses that

when she was sewing in her “closet”, the young prince had come before her in a disheveled appearance and “with a look so piteous in purport / As if he had been loosed out of hell /To speak of horrors” (2.1.82-84). He held her by the wrist for an uncomfortable amount of time while staring deeply into her eyes before exiting her room with a profound sigh. Although this incident’s main function is to highlight Hamlet’s “antic disposition” and to convince the court members of his madness, Ophelia’s emotional distress, which this situation has engendered, is often disregarded (by her father and the critics).

Despite the common Elizabethan recognition that Hamlet’s symptoms are characteristic of a Mad Lover,⁷ it is noteworthy that this occurrence has triggered emotional distress in Ophelia’s psyche, which she could not refrain from expressing. She declares that she “has been so affrighted,” and although she did not know the cause of his affliction, his behavior has unnerved her. To this point, it is essential to allude yet again to Ophelia’s greenness. Her inexperience and naivety in courting practices as well as the social restrictions imposed on her render this encounter stressful and emotionally disturbing. Having her privacy violated, Ophelia, who usually withholds and suppresses her feelings, finds herself in need of an emotional outlet. “There is real violence in [Hamlet’s] appearance” (Salkeld 92), which manages to disturb and unsettle the young maid’s disposition. Moreover, one ought to take into consideration that Hamlet has invaded the young maid’s private lodging unannounced and with his “doublet all unbrac’d/ no hat upon his head, his stockings foul’d/ ungarter’d and down-gyved to his ankle” (2.1.78-80). She also could not predict the actions of a ‘mad’ person nor comprehend his intentions. Thus, his actions constitute a danger

⁷ Polonius comments on Hamlet’s altered disposition stating that: “this is the very ecstasy of love/ whose violent property fordoes itself/ and leads the will to better undertaking.” (2.1.102-104)

that could stain her chastity and ‘honour,’ especially when considering the power imbalance governing their relationship: he is a prince, and she is simply a lord’s daughter.

Another event that has left an emotional scar on Ophelia’s psyche occurs during the (in)famous nunnery scene, 3.1, which starts with Hamlet delivering his “to be or not to be” soliloquy. As this scene unfolds, Ophelia awkwardly stands on stage pretending to read a book. Her presence in the background of the scene simultaneously highlights and parallels her social position within the play. She is literally and metaphorically in an in-between position: she is a young female alienated by her male counterparts, yet simultaneously used as a medium to achieve their purposes. Moreover, Ophelia is ridiculed for her naivety as Hamlet harshly proclaims he does not have affection for her and that she should have not believed him when he declared his love, subsequently validating her father and brother’s previous warnings. The situation is further aggravated as he publicly humiliates her by insinuating that she is not “fair” and “honest,” and repeatedly commands her to “get thee to a nunnery” (3.1.121). The unignorable pun on the term “nunnery,” which during the Elizabethan era paradoxically denoted a convent and a brothel, in vulgar slang, and Hamlet’s insistence on its repetitive use subtly violates the basis of Ophelia’s virtuous person. Significantly, the effect of this “shock to [her] tender sensibilities” (Camden 249) is not perceivable until she re-appears on stage in a distracted disposition, as she sings her Valentine ballad

Young men will do't, if they come to't;

By cock, they are to blame.

Quoth she, before you tumbled me,

You promised me to wed. (4.5.60-63)

The song can be read as a lament for Ophelia's defiled reputation; Hamlet in a sense has metaphorically "tumbled" her as he blemishes the virgin persona she has tried to uphold, tampering with a core component of her identity. This song is also reminiscent of the first time Hamlet barges, unannounced, into Ophelia's private chambers in a disheveled appearance, an action which could have brought about a stain to her chastity.

Ophelia's psyche is further burdened by the unexpected murder of her father, a figure whose guidance she has unquestionably followed. At such a young and fragile age, she not only has to endure social constraints and tolerate Hamlet's impertinent and discourteous conduct towards her, but she must also confront a traumatic and abruptly profound loss. According to Michael Macdonald,

seventeenth-century people were as convinced as we are that social and psychological stress disturbed the minds and corroded the health of its victims. [...] writers of all kinds warned that fear and grief, especially when they were sudden and intense, sometimes caused madness and even death. Doctors, astrologers, preachers, and philosophers drew up almost identical lists of commonplace misfortunes that imperiled the sanity of ordinary people. The physician and demonologist William Drage printed this catalogue of typical disturbing experiences. "Sadness, Fears, and scares, [...] loss of love, [...] destiny of friends and loss of estates." (72-73)

One should bear in mind that Drage's use of the term "friends" refers to its early modern definition, which denotes one's blood relatives. Based on these pertinent observations, it is arguable that the aforementioned series of misfortunes, presented by Drage, correlate with Ophelia's circumstances and the afflictions that transpire in her life; parallels can be drawn between her experience and its

effects on her psyche, and the conditions perceived in mentally ill individuals during the early modern period. Indeed, on the one hand, Ophelia has to adhere to the entrenched societal and cultural constraints, imposed on, and instilled in her from a young age. On the other hand, she has to endure and face the fear caused by Hamlet's uncanny behavior, the loss of his supposed love, public humiliation over the distortion of her chaste image—a primary component of her identity— and grief and anguish over her father's death. These events, hence, constitute a series of psychological triggers that are bound to negatively affect her mental condition. Ophelia's mental health has suffered from a variety of blows that have led to the manifestation of a form of mental disability, which has been labeled by the other characters as madness.

Although Elizabethan dramatists' representations of mental distractions differed to a certain extent from how doctors at the time understood and viewed them, the perspectives seem to overlap at certain points. Indeed, during the Renaissance, the roots of mental disabilities had a variety of explanations. Bereavement, for instance, was considered a common cause for conditions such as madness and despair. As revealed by Macdonald in his analysis of the records kept by physicians of the time, such as Richard Napier,⁸

nobody, not even the most solid soul, could endure the death of a father, a husband, a son, a mother, a wife, a daughter without a fit of grieving madness. The stories Napier's patients and their worried relatives told him reflect the same belief that the loss of family members was so hard to bear that it made some people insane. Bereavement was the third most

⁸ Richard Napier was a physician who documented the mental states of the patients he treated during his travels throughout England.

common stress revealed to him [...] Its victims grieved for their dead parents, children, husbands, and wives. (77-78)

Ophelia is no exception. The sudden loss of her father represents the final straw that has broken her mental defenses. In Claudius's words "this is the poison of deep grief. It springs/ All from her father's death" (4.5.49-50). Although attributing the causes of Ophelia's mental disability solely to her father's death is extreme, the king's remark cannot be dismissed as it bears a socio-historical accuracy.

One ought to bear in mind that the Renaissance terminology for madness differs from contemporary connotations. A significant distinction is that the term's usage, during the early modern period, did not strictly allude to a "social identity." Madness was considered a "temporary disability that could (presumably) happen to anyone: it was not generally considered a permanent state of being (let alone a lifelong identity)" (Loftis 152-3). Moreover, it is noteworthy that the reception of mental disability during this period was intrinsically linked to gender. Lindsey Row-Heyveld argues, in her book *Dissembling Disability in Early Modern English Drama*, that "the double, mutually reinforcing relationship between disability and femininity granted disabled women distinctly different responses from disabled men" (101). Indeed, whereas the men displaying an intellectual disability, such as Hamlet, were regarded with suspicion and criticism, the women in similar circumstances were subject to a different type of scrutiny. Accordingly, Tobin Siebers argues, in his essay "Shakespeare Differently Disabled", that "either mental disability is paradigmatically gendered female or women's mental state is always already disabled [...] in sexist society" (4). Hence, Ophelia's seemingly sudden change in speech and demeanor renders her, in the eyes of the other characters, mad as she appears "driven into desp'rate terms" (4.7.26) with her wits overthrown and "divided from herself and her fair judgement" (4.5.84). Her speech becomes

incomprehensible to the members of the court and her actions and gesticulations are seen as abnormal.

Interestingly, modern day psychologists have noted similar reactions in trauma victims.⁹ A brief clarification is perhaps needed in this context. The term “trauma” commonly denotes

a blow to the tissues of the body—or more frequently now, to the tissues of the mind—that results in injury or some other disturbance. Something alien breaks in on you, smashing through whatever barriers your mind has set up as a line of defense. It invades you, takes you over, becomes a dominating feature of your interior landscape— [...] and in the process threatens to drain you and leave you empty. (Erikson 183)

In other words, trauma can transpire in the form of an overwhelming aberrant event or experience that penetrates the mind’s pre-established defenses, and in the process invades the person’s innermost private spaces. “To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event” (Caruth 5); the mind is taken over by the recurrent memory of the disturbing and stressful image(s) or event(s) it experiences. From this perspective, the different disquieting events that Ophelia has suffered can be considered traumatic as they breach her mental stability and shake her sanity, or at the very least manage to alter her self-restricted courteous behavior.

When ‘insane’ Ophelia first appears on stage, in her disheveled appearance, she starts by mourning her father. She sings the lines:

He is dead and gone, lady

He is dead and gone

⁹ See *Unclaimed experience* (1996), Caruth.

At his head a grass green turf

At his heels a stone

[...]

White his shroud as the mountain snow— (4.5.29–35)

Perhaps the repetitive mention of her father's disappearance, a form of delayed mourning, is an eventual expression of her 'incomprehensible' unexpected traumatic loss, especially considering that Ophelia's sudden insanity initially afflicts her off stage with no prior mention of the effect of her father's death on her psyche. As Neely points out, "this speech enables Ophelia to mourn her father's death, enact his funeral, encounter his dead body, and [perhaps] find consolation for her loss" (52). Hence, it is arguable that Ophelia's experience can be grouped into what Sarah Wood Anderson terms as "domestic trauma" which is trauma that "takes place at the site of the domestic" (6). This type of trauma, as noted by Anderson, is often overshadowed by the normative and more recognized "representations of war-made, masculine trauma" (6). Although Anderson employs the term to identify the private traumatic experiences of women during the modern period through arguing that "the tragedies of wars drew attention away from the domestic and private, marginalizing those who dwelt there, namely women and children, while privileging the activities of men" (61). It is possible to include Renaissance females, such as Ophelia, into this category as they belong to the domestic and are in a sense traumatized by it. Indeed, Ophelia's trauma is "initiated and perpetuated by her domestic situation, a situation not traditionally accepted as being traumatic" (Anderson 48), which makes it all the more mentally straining for the character.

Another recent standpoint on trauma is presented by therapist and trauma specialist Resmaa Menakem. He states that although trauma is commonly thought of as the outcome of a "specific

and deeply painful event,” for example experiencing a dangerous accident or receiving the news of someone's death, which could possibly trigger traumatic reactions, it is not the only explanation or definition that should be taken into consideration. Alternatively, he remarks that

trauma can also be the body's response to a long sequence of smaller wounds. It can be a response to anything that it experiences as too much, too soon, or too fast. [...] Trauma can also be the body's response to anything unfamiliar or anything it doesn't understand, even if it isn't cognitively dangerous. (14)

This is noticeable in Ophelia's case in view of all the various factors that have led to the deterioration of her mental health, and to the development of her distracted frame of mind. In a way, her condition is analogous to that of trauma victims who experience a sequence of seemingly negligible blows which are bound to leave emotional scarring and bear detrimental effects on their cognitive capacities. Interestingly, when “mad” Ophelia is first presented to the audience, it is from the perspective of a gentleman who notes that

She speaks much of her father, says she hears

There's tricks i'th' world, and hems, and beats her heart,

Spurns enviously at straws, speaks things in doubt

That carry but half sense. Her speech is nothing. (4.5.4-8)

Ophelia's uncustomary actions: beating her heart as well as her winks, nods, gestures, and fragmented speech can be read as her body's physical reaction to the “unfamiliar” and incomprehensible series of tormenting events that have cumulatively strained her mental faculties. Concurrently, her gestures “show that madness is exhibited by the body as well as in speech:

gesture and speech, equally convulsive, blend together” (Neely 52). Accordingly, I contend that Ophelia’s developing of a mental disability is partly the outcome of an accumulation of stressful and traumatic events that, when piled up, become unbearable to her already drained adolescent psyche, and which are subsequently manifested in her body language and speech.

Ophelia’s mental disability is expressed through the different ballads that she sings after succumbing to madness. Through the articulation of these songs, she manages to find an outlet for the accumulated feelings she has been repressing. It also enables her to vocalize and revisit her suppressed traumas. Indeed, on the one hand, her ballads are reminiscent of the distressful events that she has experienced and was unable to comment upon as she had to uphold an obedient public image. This is evident for example in her St Valentine’s Day song, in which she alludes to the effect the metaphorical, and perhaps even physical, loss of her chaste image has had on her. On the other hand, her songs function as critical commentaries that enable her to turn her marginal position of social inferiority into one of visibility; they constitute the medium through which she manages to grab the attention of the court’s members. As remarked by Siebers, singing for Ophelia signifies “claim[ing] disability and its capacity to represent points of view on the margins of power.” (“Shakespeare Differently Disabled” 450).¹⁰ Indeed, it is undeniable that the character only manages to verbalize her inner thoughts, to a certain extent, when she descends into a state of madness.

¹⁰ Siebers in his essay argues that Ophelia “embodies the knowledge of what it means to be a mentally disabled woman in her society” (448). He describes her madness as a “rebellion” because there is “reason” in it. However, he considers part of her on-stage appearance, in which she implicitly criticizes her society, to be a “spectacle,” a type of counterfeit madness. Although Siebers notes that “while Ophelia has reason to masquerade as mad— to add one more layer of stigma to her marginal status as a young woman, especially if it enhances her social criticism— her behaviour before and after the mad songs seems to include no signs of counterfeiting” (451), I find myself inclined to another point of view. Contrary to Siebers’ reading, I perceive Ophelia as genuinely mad, and that her mental condition is the outcome of the distressing life experiences that she has undergone.

Ophelia's songs grant her the ability to revisit and sound out her deeply subdued frustrations, which reflect the collective desperation of the female youth in similar circumstances. As Siebers asserts, in his previously mentioned article, she utters her "sad individual fate in addition to the fate of many young women" (449). This is also perceivable in the iconic scene where Ophelia distributes flowers to the members of the court.

There's rosemary, that's for remembrance--- pray you, love, remember. And there is pansies, that's for thoughts. [...] There's fennel for you, and columbines. There's rue for you, and here's some for me. We may call it herb of grace o Sundays. Oh, you must wear your rue with a difference. There's a daisy. I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died. They say he made a good end. (4.5.172-182)

The transition in Ophelia's speech from verse to prose is significant as it is comparable to Hamlet's melancholically deep contemplations of the state of the world in 2.2. Here Ophelia portrays a witty mind that contrasts the king's assertion that she is "divided from herself and her fair judgement" (4.5.84) for she subtly unveils the hypocrisy that pervades the court through her use of symbolism. Her flower distribution "is an extension of her 'quoted' discourse, an enacted ritual of dispersal, symbolizing lost love, deflowering, and death. A secularized cultural ritual of maturation and mourning is enacted through Ophelia's alienated speech" (Neely 52). Ultimately, her 'mental unraveling' leads to a state of psychological disinhibition as she unloads some of the heavy emotions she has been repressing.

Being identified as mentally disabled in a sense alters Ophelia's public identity, or more precisely it unveils part of her being that has prior been invisible to other characters and audience alike. In his book *Disability Theory*, Siebers points out that "to call disability an identity is to recognize that it is not a biological or natural property but an elastic social category both subject to

social control and capable of effecting social change” (4). Interestingly, according to Row-
Heyveld, the “threat an individual posed to the peace,” in early modern England, was considered a
main factor for their qualification to be labeled as mentally disabled, especially into categorizes
such as “madness” or “lunacy” (“Antic Dispositions” 76). Although Ophelia’s distraction has not
engendered the same type of danger Hamlet’s feigned madness has caused, her condition has
managed to stir unease and weariness; Horatio notes that “twere good she were spoken with, for
she may strew/ dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds” (4.5.14-15). Hence, her unfamiliar
state of difference has the potential to disrupt the court’s social order. Accordingly, a special
emphasis ought to be placed on the fact that Ophelia’s external identification as a mad woman, and
therefore intellectually disabled, primarily stems from the court members’ unanimous agreement
that she is in fact “mad.” This agreement is chiefly based on the sudden transformation they
perceive in her previously courteous behavior, which ceases to conform to the norms and
regulations of her social *milieu*.

Read in this way, Ophelia’s state of mental difference, in addition to being the outcome of
traumatic experiences that her young fragile mind could not easily overcome, can be perceived as
“caused by a disabling environment” (Siebers, “Shakespeare Differently Disabled”, 440). Indeed,
the main identifying factor for Ophelia’s condition as madness is the other characters’ intentional
disregard of the meaning of her words, categorizing her speech rather as word salad, especially in
light of the abrupt change in her speech and her ‘unorthodox’ gesticulations. As the gentleman
notes, despite it being “nothing,”

The unshaped use of [her speech] doth move

The hearers to collection; they yawn at it,

And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts,

Which, as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,

Indeed would make one think there might be thought,

Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily. (4.5.8-13)

This unwillingness to find meaning in her utterances and the indifference to her tragic losses coupled with the various negative receptions of her mental metamorphosis have led to the labeling of the character's state of mental difference as madness and of her speech as nonsensical.

Madness manifests in Ophelia as the outcome of a series of distressing and mind-numbing events, which have left her in a state of abnormal disturbance. Indeed, her behavior becomes completely altered as she struggles to endure a variety of blows to her fragile and unripe mind. Madness becomes an inevitable outcome as it enables her to sound out her suppressed emotions and to lament her loss of kin, love, and reputation. When viewed from a modern perspective, Ophelia's condition, can be interpreted as the outcome of domestic trauma.

Chapter 2 – The Sanity of Madness / The Madness of Sanity

Hamlet's Ophelia is merely one (in)famous example of the various manifestations of female mental disabilities, whether feigned or real, on the early modern stage. In fact, the representation of madwomen in Renaissance drama is abundant, and had become more prominent during the seventeenth century as playwrights started to use Bedlam hospital as a main setting,¹¹ in which they positioned their mentally (dis)abled characters. Oscillating between two worlds, Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling* is a gripping double plotted play that grapples with the notion of early modern mental distraction from different angles. In its main plot, the play focuses on two seemingly polar-opposite characters: the physically disabled servant, De Flores, and the enchantingly captivating daughter of his patron, with whom he is enamored, Beatrice-Joanna. Through the play we witness the transformation of the relation between this couple from one of unrequited obsession into a complex web of grotesque schemes, murder, treachery, and adultery. The subplot, however, occurs in a completely different setting, a madhouse, and presents the audience with different character dynamics. It chronicles the struggles of the female protagonist, Isabella, as she attempts to maneuver and guard her virtue in an environment brimming with mentally unstable characters. Indeed, being at the center of the 'insane' attention of different male characters, some of whom feign mental distraction to be granted access to the confined beauty, affects Isabella's psyche. In this male dominated world with its constrictive patriarchal rules and regulations, the female protagonists of both plots flounder to achieve their desires. This part of my thesis aims to shed light on the Jacobean on-stage manifestations and exhibitions of female mental (dis)abilities through the exploration of the intricacies of Isabella and Beatrice-

¹¹ See Kenneth Jackson's *Separate Theaters* and Carol Thomas Neely's "Rethinking confinement in Early Modern England: The Place of Bedlam in History and Drama" for a historical understanding of the place of Bedlam on and off stage during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Joanna's characters in relation to notions such as "dissembled disability," the female body, and the domestic spaces.

1. Domestic Confinement, the Female body, and Mental (Dis)ability

In this section, I seek to explore the techniques through which Isabella acquires her strategies of counterfeited disability. This will be mainly investigated through the analysis of her state of unvoluntary entrapment, and her interactions with her husband's assistant, Lollo, and the two dissembling madman and fool, Franciscus and Antonio. Further, I will draw on Row-Heyveld's concept of counterfeited disability to analyze Isabella's disguise of a madwoman and its effect on her frame of mind and sense of self. I also attempt to investigate the possibility of her crossing the threshold of real lunacy during her spectacle of feigned madness.

Despite being perfectly sane, Isabella has been condemned by her husband to permanent 'domestic' confinement in an isolated part of his "madhouse". Her predicament is chiefly caused by the latter's insecurity, stemming from the glaring age difference between the couple. Indeed, since his "wife is young" (1.2.16) whereas he is "old", Alibius resorts to holding her as a captive, limiting her movement. He believes that he ought to not only 'protect' her from the dangers of sexual temptations, but more importantly to prevent her from becoming a threat to his masculine identity if she becomes dishonest. Alibius, anxiously terrified that Isabella's youth and beauty would intensify what he believes to be her treacherous womanly nature, deems her all the more capable of adultery, and a cause of his subsequent 'cuckolding'.¹²

¹²In the Renaissance, it was believed that an unfaithful wife, who commits adultery, can metaphorically 'transfigure' her husband into a horned 'beast,' i.e. a cuckold. See Foyster (1999) and Callaghan (1989) for further details on the notion of a 'cuckold' and the concept of manhood during the early modern era.

This viewpoint originates from the early modern understanding of the female essence in conjunction with the prevalent Christian theological constructions. Indeed, “the latter defined women as the ‘daughters of Eve’ and, therefore, problematically responsible for sin. In the Christian tradition, women’s reproductive bodies were cursed after ‘the Fall’ from the Garden of Eden. Women were, thus, symbolic of the wrath of God” (Capern5). This notion easily led to the categorization of women as adjacent figures to men, rather than being fully-fleshed, both reason and body. During the early modern times, men, as head of society, religiously and socially legitimized their power and control over what they perceived as their ‘incomplete’, ‘other’, and ‘lesser’ half. Subsequently, this understanding confined women to “figure[s] that need to be contained, viewing [them] as inherently inferior, uncontrollable, and prone to a wide range of vices and disabilities” (Kemp 31). However, it ironically reveals a form of deep masculine anxiety; the male social identity is deeply unsettled by and through the female body. In attempts to marginalize it, the female body inadvertently commands “center stage, and women’s bodies, with their ability to change shape and hide secrets, represent a threatening nature which the taxonomies and structures of patriarchally conceived culture must at all costs control” (Hopkins 11-12). Consequently, Isabella’s presence and confinement in the play reflects the aforementioned ‘anxieties’ that seep into the rigid divisions of the early modern constructions of society. She constitutes a subtle threat to her husband’s manhood since “through her sexual agency, [she] has the power to graft the cuckold’s horns onto [his] forehead” (Waldron 619). Hence, Alibius’ incarceration of Isabella can be read as a preemptive attempt to maintain his notions of dignity, bestowed by his gender dominance and patriarchal privilege.

In her initial stage appearance, Isabella's introductory lines demonstrate a sense of deep frustration as well as a state of confused astonishment at the inhumane treatment to which she is subjected. She asks:

Why, sirrah? Whence have you commission

To fetter the doors against me? If you

Keep me in a cage, pray whistle to me,

Let me be doing something (3.3.1-4)

The enumeration of expressions such as “keep in a cage” and “fetter the doors against,” with their allusion to her bestial like entrapment, is a conspicuous demonstration of Isabella's deep infuriation with the situation imposed upon her. Accordingly, her phraseology, “whistle to,” alludes to as well as amplifies her animal-like treatment, and her sense of inferiority and subservience. Hence, Isabella's discourse is indicative of her inner state of mind; she feels frustrated and helpless towards her captivity. She is also aware of her social (in)significance. Indeed, Isabella is conscious of the limitations imposed on her by her role as a wife within the stratified composition of the early modern social sphere, especially within the domain of the household. Yet she is equally conscious of her relevance as a wife who needs to guard her marital chastity to preserve her husband's honor. This is evident in her response “‘tis very well, and he'll prove very wise” (3.3.11) to Lollio, after his mentioning the reason as well as the reasoning behind her entrapment.

It is noteworthy that women's space, in which they found their social value and physical autonomy, used to be the domestic sphere, i.e., the household. Thus, marriage had a particular significance for women which usually meant “freedom within the physical constraints of a

controlled and even closed household” (Capern 9). Subsequently, Isabella’s confinement undermines her social agency and the ‘liberty’ she could have obtained as a housewife. It is important to draw attention to the point that the “gendered familial roles” and the patriarchal constructions of the early modern period “further played out within the dominant social structures for particular women and could be relatively open, allowing women power and influence, or they could be highly enclosed, leaving women with little agency in their relationships” (Capern 9). The latter is undoubtedly Isabella’s case as she is left with little to no agency in her marriage. She is stripped from her freedom of movement inside the domestic space— women’s domain. According to Laura Gowing, the early modern social ideology confined women’s “realm to the domestic sphere [...] At the heart of marital advice were prescriptions that defined men's role as public, and women's as domestic” (29). Isabella is “caged” in an isolated setting the doors of which are “fettered” against her. She feels like an innocent prisoner shackled and restrained without just cause, a crimeless criminal. The root of her condemnation lies in her husband’s suspicions, though no fault of her own. She is a victim of her birth as Eve’s daughter, bearer of the original sin through her gender, and her husband’s paranoia.

The ‘doctor’s’ wife is not only confined in the madhouse, but she is also constantly supervised by Lollo, her husband’s assistant. Indeed, Alibius instructs the latter to “watch [Isabella’s] treadings, and in [his] absence, / supply [his] place” (1.2.39-40). The ambiguity of the statement opens room for multiple interpretations. On the one hand, Lollo is provided permission and access to another man’s wife, allowing him to intrude upon the couple’s intimate relationship, and by consequence is, indirectly, provided physical legitimacy over Isabella. She, on the other hand, is transformed into a piece of property that ought to be maintained and constantly supervised. Lollo’s first interactions with Isabella, consisting of statements such as “you shall be doing, if it

please you; I'll whistle to you if you'll pipe after” and “‘tis for my masters pleasure, lest being taken in another man's corn, you might be pounded in another place” (3.3.5,9-11), are pregnant with graphic sexual innuendoes and word play heedless to the sensibilities of a lady. Another instance of blatant impudence occurs when introducing her to Antonio: he sarcastically reassures her to not fear him for “‘tis a gentle nidget; you may play with him, as safely with him as with his bauble” (3.3.102). His ‘friendly’ invitation takes an indecent turn when taking into consideration the wordplay on the term “bauble,” which refers to a jester’s, a court’s fool’s, wand.¹³ Lollo’s wordplay denotes his suppressed carnal desires towards Isabella.

Throughout the course of their interactions, the assistant’s mode of address for Isabella is undeniably evocative of a degrading and a diminishing of her subjective identity into simply that of an eroticized female body. Indeed, his discourse is brimming with sexual innuendoes and euphemisms, commanding and authoritative tones, and unrefined utterances, which, in concomitance with a blatantly disrespectful behavior, would escalate into sexual harassment. For example, after witnessing Antonio and Francisco’s advances on Isabella, his reaction was not to aid her, nor at the very least attempt to salvage his master’s honor, but rather to obtain his “share, that's all; I'll have my fool's part with you” (3.3.241). In fact, he attempts to kiss her forcefully and relentlessly, as she denies his advances, all while blurting “come, sweet rogue, kiss me, my little Lacedemonian. Let me feel how thy pulses beat; thou hast a thing about thee would do a man pleasure, I'll lay my hand on't” (3.3.231-233). Isabella is thus merely an object of desire, a forbidden fruit not meant to be touched yet irresistibly tasted.

¹³ During the early modern period, a court jester’s scepter, i.e. bauble, had a conspicuously phallic shape. For more on fools and folly See William Willeford’s *Fool & His Scepter: A Study of Clowns & Jesters & Their Audience*, 1969

Lollio is not the sole 'stranger' who regards and treats Isabella in a lustful manner. Indeed, the two male characters, Franciscus and Antonio, who feign mental disability within the wards of the madhouse, also deem her an object of desire. Franciscus likens her to Titania, queen of the fairies in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, insinuating that her husband's absence should be filled by his presence, subtly suggesting that she should commit adultery with him. Antonio on the other hand, discards his masque of folly, and manages to steal a kiss. From this perspective, "bedlam is [...] the dramatic locus in which male desire seeks its object in the female body" (Salkeld 137). Interestingly, Isabella wittily remarks that

...Would a woman stray,

She need not gad abroad to seek her sin;

It would be brought home one ways or other:

The needle's point will to the fixed north,

Such drawing arctics women's beauties are. (3.3.209-13).

Despite the ceaseless male effort to control women's chastity, whether through constant supervision or confinement, it is clear that sin does not lay within a woman's control. It is rather the men who would initiate sinful behavior, yet the other gender has to suffer the consequences.

To preserve her bodily autonomy and safeguard her virtue, Isabella resorts to mimicking the real and feigned madness(es) performed by the other characters confined in the madhouse: e.g., Antonio and Francisco. In fact, she pertinently details the mannerisms and actions of the lunatics inhabiting the asylum, who according to her,

... act their fantasies in any shapes

Suiting their present thoughts: if sad, they cry;

If mirth be their conceit, they laugh again.

Sometimes they imitate the beasts and birds,

Singing or howling, braying, barking; all

As their wild fancies prompt 'em. (3.3.190-195)

This insightful observation demonstrates an extensive understanding of the manifestation of madness akin to a physician's examination. Isabella's wit is highlighted in contrast to her husband and his assistant's unintelligent diagnoses of the lunatics. Her emphasis on the bestial traits of the madhouse's occupants —they act out their untamed wants and utter animalistic sounds— evokes the “traditional association between madness and animals” (Mendelson 166). Similarly, Isabella refers to her plight through animalistic terminology, as discussed earlier, denoting her own self-perception, as she feels her entrapment to be that of a beast. It is worth noting that the real mad persons in the madhouse are neither presented by name nor by gender, rather they are referred to as simply madmen and fools; they are anonymous — nameless, genderless, and distinctively unremarkable. Their anonymity reflects that madness on-stage can render a person unrecognizable. Hence, Isabella seeks through her disguise of a madwoman to embody these characteristics. She herself becomes anonymous through her mad disguise.

Through her masquerade of madness, Isabella fits into what Row-Heyveld labels as the “counterfeit-disability tradition.” She identifies disability dissemblers as characters, males and/or females, who feign any form of disability, whether physical or intellectual, in order to achieve

certain goals that would have been otherwise unattainable due to social, cultural, religious, and gender constraints; hence their aim is to generally “gain access to a geographical or social freedom that was previously unavailable to them” (39). More importantly, according to Row-Heyveld, the significance of performing dissembled disability lies specifically with the “reception of that performance.” It highlights thereby the significance of the “question of audience response anchoring major movements in plot and cohering important thematic issues [...] particularly those related to identity” (Row-Heyveld 40). In *The Changeling*, this is unraveled mainly through the effect Antonio’s and Franciscus’ feigned spectacles of madness and folly have on their “on-stage audiences” (Row-Heyveld 40), specifically Isabella. She perceptively analyzes their behaviors and speech mannerisms, absorbing in the process their strategies of counterfeited disablement. She recognizes through their deceptive performances that the altering of one’s social identity could bring about a difference in the degree of freedom allocated to them. Indeed, feigning mental disability allowed Antonio and Franciscus “opportune” (3.3.115) access to the innerworkings of the madhouse, imparting them with “the safest and the nearest [way]/ to tread the galaxia to [their] star” (3.3.134-135). Moreover, they also have managed to stretch the boundaries of their identities: one transforms himself into a fool¹⁴ whereas the other transfigures into a mad poet. Isabella, as evidenced in the lines quoted above, is an active observer as she notes their interactions and coded speech and subsequently implements similar tactics in her disguise of a madwoman.

Perhaps the most impactful interaction on Isabella’s ensuing appearance as a madwoman is the one with Franciscus, the mad poet. Lollo presents him to Isabella as a “a taste of the madman,” a prominent example of what he believes madmen are like. During their first encounter, she pities his delusional state, perceiving him as a “proper/ body, [...] without brains to guide it” (3.3.24).

¹⁴ It is worth noting that even his name Antonio is changed into Tony in his fool condition.

She also grows weary of his behavior viewing him as “a danger” (3.3.53), as he starts reacting aggressively toward Lollo. However, the subsequent unraveling of his sane mental disposition, after “having [...] cast off this counterfeit cover of a madman” (4.3.13), sheds light on the liberties madness can afford a person. Indeed, during his state of feigned madness, Franciscus identifies as Tiresias, the hermaphrodite blind prophet, as he states that “I am the man [...] I was a man/ seven years ago [...] Now I'm a woman, all feminine” (3.3.66-71). This correlation to the Greek seer bears eminent significance as it denotes a sense of identity in flux, an unorthodox concept at the time. As Row-Heyveld, quoting Peter Hyland, maintains:

in an extremely hierarchical culture and in an era of increasingly strict imposition of identity markers, disguise plots offered “a spectacle of transformation that suggested liberating protean possibilities, and ... contradicted all that [early modern English people were] insistently told about the fixity of identity.” (213)

Franciscus by identifying as Tiresias blurs the lines between gender constraints and in the process acquires genderfluidity. Interestingly, Isabella bears witness to the interaction between him and Lollo. She also receives a letter from Franciscus, in which he reveals his mad disguise and his real identity as a sane person. Subsequently, it is safe to argue that she comes to the realization that it is through the disguise of lunacy that the shackles of her womanhood, which have led to her confinement, can be overcome. Madness opens the possibility for the creation of an alternate identity that can offer her an outlet from at least the need of conforming to societal rules. Hence, parallels can be drawn between his state of feigned madness and hers.

The concept of dissembled disability, as argued by Row-Heyveld, is related to the notion of gender. She notes that on-stage counterfeited fraudulent female madness dramatizes and

caricatures, to a certain extent at least, the relation between femininity and disability identities. Notably, “since these performances offer exaggerated images of both femininity and disability,” female characters, while cloaking themselves with the veil of feigned madness, “expose the constructedness of both identities, unsettling the corporeal and gender norms that limited women’s subjectivity” (Row-Heyveld 103). Therefore, by dissembling disability women are capable of cleaving open the “artificiality of those constructs.” Concurrently, however, women’s satirical spectacles tamper with and subvert the audience’s expectations of both womanhood and mental disability. In fact, “action and new formations of identity [are no longer] controlled by the oppressive constructs that initially limit them.” Hence, these female characters are offered alternative possibilities as well as the recourse of undertaking secure “exploits,” which would otherwise lead to insufferable consequences (Row-Heyveld 103). This concept is related to Siebers’ notion of “disability masquerade,” explored in *Disability Theory*, which emphasizes the “performative” aspect of authentic disability through the association of the non-normative body with the problem of identification. Siebers argues that even the genuinely disabled individuals are more-often-than-not required to exaggerate their conditions and symptoms as a result of extensive social conditioning: they feel the need to comply with society’s pastiche of what disability ought to resemble, or they risk becoming the objects of suspicion and mistrust. A person is not identified or viewed as disabled, unless he fills out a predefined checklist, in the collective imaginary of behaviors, quirks, ticks, etc., deemed acceptable, as signs of disability, from the point of view of the public. Hence, the borders between real, feigned, and exaggerated become indistinguishable. This is evident in the play through Isabella’s performance of madness.

Isabella wears the mask of lunacy as a protective shield to escape the constraints of her gender. Using Siebers’ language, she “puts on a socially stigmatized identity as her disguise. She

mimics neither the normative nor the dominant social position. She displays [madness as her] stigma to protect herself” and her virtue from the ceaseless sexual advances of the madhouse’s occupants (101). She sheds her frame of desirability to thwart the unwanted attention. In the process, her actions and mannerisms switch from virtue into promiscuity; inadvertently, she is no longer the threatened prey, she is now the threatening sexual predator on the premises. According to Salkeld, “Isabella finds in madness a place to resist male strategies of sexual harassment. This is hardly an effective or desirable position [...] but it forms the only ground on which Isabella can assert any sort of identity other than that of a sexual quarry” (141). Hence, by adopting this newly discovered coping mechanism, she manages to embrace and embody the tendencies and behaviors of the fools and the mad, granting her the liberty of agency.

Isabella takes hold of her presumably repressed desires, perhaps for the first time, to initiate sexual contact. Shockingly, however, she is met with a harsh rejection and disdain from a suitor previously infatuated with her beauty and sexual appeal. Indeed, when confronted with a ‘mad’ Isabella, Antonio cannot tolerate her presence. The roles, thus, are ironically reversed. She takes the initiative –tries to kiss him–, while he not only denies her advances, declaring: “Pox upon you, let me alone!” (4.3.116), but also threatens to “kick thee if again thou touch me, / Thou wild unshapen antic; I am no fool, /You bedlam!” (4.3.122-24). MacDonald notes that ““Bedlam [was] a slang term for utter madness” (122). Accordingly, from the point of view of her on-stage audience, Isabella is transfigured from a desirable woman into an untamed antic, a Bedlamite. In other words, by dissembling mental disability and embracing the cloak of madness, an “undesirable stereotype” (Siebers, *Disability Theory*, 102), she manages to deconstruct the predetermined gender norms and undesirable fixations projected upon her. Despite her unaltered physical characteristics, Isabella manages to metaphorically unsex her body as she unshackles the culturally

predefined gender norms, relating women to obedience and femininity; she becomes, from Antonio's perspective, undesirable and disfigured. She is metamorphosed, thus, from an object of lustful desire into an unrecognizable unwanted creature. Additionally, her "performance of disability allows her to use the sexual proposition of another man to affirm her chaste devotion to her husband" (Row-Heyveld 103). Isabella simply becomes a mad person.

Isabella's psyche has been altered by her disguise of a madwoman as she actually becomes mad. Even though some critics such as Neely argue that "by performing madness, [Isabella] inoculates herself against it" (Neely 196), I believe that one cannot overlook the character's comment "I came a feigner to return stark mad" (4.3.133). Indeed, at the height of her mad spectacle, it seems like the confined wife has truly fallen into the trap of madness. As Salkeld maintains, "in contradiction to its discourse, reason gives rise to madness, and madness subsequently speaks of reason's self-subversion" (60). This interpretation becomes more probable when examining the series of unfortunate circumstances Isabella has to endure throughout the play. On the one hand, she is forcefully confined in a ward in her husband's madhouse, surrounded by "none but fools and madmen" (3.3.14). On the other hand, due to her husband's continual absence and mistrust, Lollio is incessantly surveilling her already restricted movements. Moreover, the background 'mad' noise in the asylum — a perpetuation of animalistic noises such as "howling, braying, barking" (3.3.194), which Isabella perceives as fearful (3.3.189), and occasionally the sound of Lollio whipping the lunatics into sanity— are all sources of psychological distress. Furthermore, she has to cope with the multiple sexual advances that bring about the objectification of her identity.

Isabella's (dis)placement in the mental asylum engenders a series of mentally overwhelming events that manage to shake up her sensibilities. The domestic realm, ironically

being the madhouse in this case, is transformed from a place of supposed healing into a source of mentally strenuous experiences. This point links back to Anderson's notion of "domestic trauma," which I referred to in the previous chapter. Indeed, Isabella is a victim of her housebound condition, stemming from the socially ingrained and mentally suffocating patriarchal norms. Additionally, Isabella's initiation of sexual contact with Antonio could be read as a subconscious surrender to her own suppressed desires. Perceiving her from this angle, it is plausible to argue that she not only counterfeits disability, but that during her performance she crosses the lines between sanity and lunacy. In her brief momentarily dissociation, she "blurs the madness/reason binary by making madness seem reasonable" (Mendelson 166), yet she herself is not. I believe that one should consider the possibility that in her attempt of dissembling disability, she oversteps the line between sanity and madness, "because feigned madness so often perfectly resembles—and even bleeds into—the real thing" (Row-Heyveld, "Antic Dispositions" 77). This does not mean that Isabella succumbs to complete lunacy, rather, for a brief moment, she loses track of who she is.

2. Ravishment, Trauma, and Madness

This second section focuses on Beatrice-Joanna, who, in the pursuit of love, falls into a pit of psychological instability.¹⁵ I analyze the metamorphosis of Beatrice-Joanna's mental disposition through exploring the space she inhabits as well as through analyzing her complex 'relationship' with De Flores. I argue that social and cultural restraints in addition to her being sexually violated alter her actions and self-perception, leading to the manifestation of a non-normative state of mind and a destabilized sense of self, bordering on the lines of (in)sanity.

¹⁵ My aim in this part is not to decipher the category to which the 'villain-heroine' ought to belong, but to simply study her character in the light of her social positioning, the circumstances she experiences, and her instable mental disposition, in relation to the cultural perceptions of the time.

Similar to Isabella, Beatrice-Joanna is also restricted to the confines of the domestic space. Although the latter possesses more liberty of movement and action, she is nonetheless shackled by equally constraining societal rules and expectations. Indeed, despite not being physically locked up within the boundaries of her father's castle, Beatrice-Joanna is still a captive to his indisputable decrees. For the female protagonist, her father, being the "one above [her]" (1.1.80), is Godly in his absolute authority; he is the one she cannot defy or resist. His "blessing," which she regards with the utmost esteem, "is only mine as I regard his name, / else it goes from me, and turns head against me, / transform'd into a curse" (2.1.21-23). Beatrice-Joanna dreads his scorn and the loss of his favor. Hence, she has to quietly submit to his commands and comply with his orders, even when they encroach upon what she believes to be her marriage prospects, despite knowing that he is well within his rights to enforce his will. She, subsequently, is restrained to his rule and control as she finds herself deprived of the possibility of marrying Alsemero, the man of her desires, instead of Alonzo de Piracquo, her father's first choice.

Male authority during the early modern period was culturally revered and secured through and within the boundaries of the household. For example, in *The Changeling*, Vermandero's castle, Beatrice-Joanna's home, is not merely a geographical space; it is also a symbol of her father's dominance. Indeed, parental authority in the Renaissance transformed the function of the "home" into "the site for the initial assertion of manhood. [...] It was by control over the women within the household that all men could most clearly show their superiority of reason and strength" (Foyster 38). Thus, righteous female conduct, centered around a chaste, obedient, and virtuous behavior, was synonymous with a dignified household. It is worth noting that, according to Sarah Curtis in her book *Space, Place, and Mental Health*, spaces can engender differing psychological and emotional effects on an individual's psyche. To illustrate, she identifies the concept of 'home' as a

series of intricate “public and private settings constructed as symbolic spaces,” which represent aspects of kinship and social persona (177). She also emphasizes the idea that ‘home spaces’ could have either favorable or damaging effects on a person’s wellbeing as well as their mental state. Perceiving it from this perspective, Vermandero’s castle, a domestic space, has a significant impact on the mental state of Beatrice-Joanna as well as her self-perception.

During the seventeenth century, women’s identities were built upon two main elements: their bodies and their positions within the domestic spaces they occupy. Ironically, as Laura Gowing maintains, “the walls of the household sealed off the body's threatening openness, [since] privacy ensured modesty and chastity” (29). Women’s experiences were confined within the domain of the private, and so were their bodies. Moreover, the notion of space denotes a variety of meanings. Mindy Fullilove asserts that the concept of “place”, besides being a geographical setting, “can be understood as standing for the human interactions occurring in a given location, that is, as the psychosocial milieu” (1517). This renders it a critical component of “identity formation” as it is “incorporated into [one’s] sense of the self” (Fullilove 1520). In Beatrice-Joanna’s circumstance, the home space imposes its dictates on the constructions of her identity as she can only exist within the frame of femininity, piety, and chastity; her social persona is predefined.

Counterintuitively, despite it being her home, Vermandero’s castle is gradually transformed into an ‘unhomely’ location for its main female occupant. From the onset of the play, the ‘unsightly’ presence of De Flores, “a gentleman/ in good respect with [her] father” (1.1.130-131) and supposedly his faithful servant, alters the “home space” (Curtis 177) into a space of discomfort and distress for Beatrice-Joanna. Indeed, De Flores’ “haunt[ing]” (1.1.232) presence has subjected the female protagonist to psychological stress and physical unease. This is evident in her multiple spiteful declarations and bitter remarks directed toward him. To illustrate, she affirms

I never see this fellow but I think

Of some harm towards me: danger's in my mind still;

I scarce leave trembling of an hour after (2.1.89-91)

Beatrice-Joanna feels extremely anxious at the mere sight of De Flores. She admits that she perceives him as a source of paranoia since, from her point of view, he is a sinister “serpent” (1.1.221), whose venomous glance and eerie disposition could taint her. The biblical reference to the serpent, the devilish symbol of treachery and temptation, indicates the fall from grace that would doom the female protagonist.

Beatrice-Joanna’s unease toward De Flores stems from his repulsive non-normative physical appearance—an “ominous fac’d fellow” (2.1.53). According to the cultural beliefs of the time, a displeasing *façade* denoted the lurking of a heinous soul underneath. Indeed, an ugly exterior used to be “interpreted as a sign of a morally corrupt nature [...], ‘Man is read in his face’” (Baker 45). This insistence upon the intertwined relation between the notions of ugliness and wickedness is asserted through religious beliefs; “theologically, the task of reconciling physical imperfections in Creation was parallel to that of explaining the presence of evil. God had made the world and all within it perfect and beautiful (Genesis 1:31); deviations from beauty were thus moves away from God and toward moral evil” (Cock and Skinner 93). This view renders De Flores’ residence within the boundaries of Beatrice-Joanna’s ‘home’ especially unsettling when combined with his unyielding fixation over her person.

Although she continuously demonstrates aversion toward his attempts, De Flores remains all the while persistent in his desire to be in proximity to Beatrice-Joanna, despite her “scorn[ful]”

attitude (1.1.97). She is the target of his lustful desires as he “please[s himself] with sight/ of her at all opportunities” (1.1.99-100). The *double-entendre* in De Flores’s statement denotes an objectification of the female protagonist’s self into a body evoking male ‘pleasure’. This is further emphasized in the striking glove scene. De Flores’ retrieval of Beatrice-Joanna’s “fall’n” gloves, in the first act, and his subsequent “thrust[ing of his] fingers into her sockets” (1.2.230) foreshadows his ravishment of her body. It can also be read as an act of power subversion as “he both eradicates the social and physical boundaries constructed by Beatrice-Joanna and points to the sex act he will perform upon her in the next scene” (Zysk 412). His vicious desire to possess, literally and metaphorically, Beatrice-Joanna is evident in “his language and gestures [...] and his view of her character [...] is a projection of his own desires” (Zysk 375). Thus, yet again, the woman’s emotions are ignored and discarded, whereas her body is unsurprisingly degraded, eroticized, and lusted after.

Beatrice-Joanna, powerless against her father’s commands, is obliged to resort to devious schemes to obtain her heart’s wishes and body’s desires. Her immediate plan is to use De Flores as a pawn and discard him afterwards, assuming that she could bribe him with a hefty sum of money. She attempts to “rid [herself] of two inveterate loatnings/ at one time” (2.2.146-147). The character’s willingness to plot for murder, in the pursuit of the possibility of marrying the person she is infatuated with, lands her in the category of lovesickness. A brief elucidation of the Renaissance understanding of this notion is in order. According to Neely, “lovesickness is associated with the melancholy humor and characterized as a disease of the head, heart, imagination, and genitals” (101). The condition is, thus, understood as somatic and mental. Moreover, Lesel Dawson notes that Lovesickness is related to the emergence of sexual desires in young women. This ailment “is wholly engendered by the erotic object, who inflames the body and

possesses the mind” (53). Beatrice-Joanna falls under this category as her initial encounter with Alsemero ignites in her “a giddy turning,” making her want to “change [her] saint” (1.1.150-151). Her statement signals a shift in her identity; she is becoming aware of her sensual needs and carnal desires as she is tempted to redirect her devotion from the holy to the sinful. For the female protagonist, Alsemero becomes the “desirous” erotic object. The early modern understanding of the intertwined relation between mind and body as well as reason and distraction related women’s main trait, femininity, to “unreason and passion” (Gowing 25). Moreover, according to Macdonald, “the household was a hierarchical network of dominance and submission, and contemporaries occasionally depicted insanity as an irrational rebellion against patriarchal and parental authority” (“Women and Madness” 273). Thus, in accordance with the Renaissance understanding of the functioning of human reason, it is safe to argue that Beatrice-Joanna portrays, from the onset of play, signs of madness.

Beatrice-Joanna’s initial subconscious fears of De Flores’s dangerous nature are transformed into reality when he, (un)expectedly, demands sexual payment for the murder he has committed in her name. Upon her refusal, she is threatened that if she does not comply, “in death and shame [his] partner she shall be,” else he will confess everything (3.4.155). Subsequently, under duress, she is transfigured from an untouchable fair lady, whose social rank and status are higher than his, into his “equal,” a “whore in [her] affections” (3.4.134,142). Her identity is irreversibly altered into that of a woman “dipp’d in blood” of murder and innocence lost (3.4.127-128). In a heartbeat she is stripped of her “modesty,” virtue, honor, and bodily autonomy by the person she detests and fears the most. She becomes tainted with dishonor, forced to comply with De Flores’ demands, who true to his name vulgarly ‘deflowers’ her.

The female protagonist's psyche is further destabilized as she is ravished by De Flores. According to Michael Dalton,¹⁶ the term Ravishment is "taken in one and the same signification with Rape, which is a violent deflowering of a woman, or a carnal knowledge had of the body of a woman against her will" (qtd. In Gowing 102). Burks argues that Beatrice-Joanna is a rape victim. This view aligns with Dalton's reasoning that in case a woman is ravished by a man, and that she "consenteth for fear of death or duress, this is ravishment against her will, for that consent ought to be voluntary and free" (qtd. In Gowing 102). Following this logic, Beatrice-Joanna belongs to this category as she is forced to comply with De Flores' demand, else she would face a shameful demise. However, according to Burks, the seventeenth century understanding of rape as a crime was ingrained in the perception that the "victims" of the deed were the men the woman belongs to, and not the female who has been violated. Indeed, "rape is not so much a physical as a social threat to women, and it is not awful because of the emotional devastation inflicted on her, but on account of the distress it causes her family and peers" (765). Hence, although rape strips the woman from her bodily autonomy, as it constitutes a violation of her body and mind, the focus is directed toward the shame the victim could afflict upon her male family members, rather than on the effects of the aggression on the woman's psyche. Hence, the negative psychological effects on Beatrice-Joanna, caused by sexual coercion, are not only overlooked, but also increased as she has to face the guilt of having ruined the family's honor.

Beatrice-Joanna's sense of self, with its main pillars being honor and modesty, is undermined and dismantled following her sexual abuse. In Hopkins' words: "Beatrice-Joanna's

¹⁶ Michael Dalton was an English barrister and legal writer. I cite this part, which is taken from his book *The Country Justice*, and cited in Laura Gowing's book. In accordance with this perspective, I employ the terms rape and ravishment interchangeably to denote the same meaning.

nature seems to be fundamentally altered by the sexual act, since she becomes 'the deed's creature' (III.iv.137), in a way that De Flores is not" (14). Her essence is no longer bound to her virginity, but to its vulgar loss. To clarify the mental transition she experiences, I believe it is important to briefly reflect upon the degree to which the female protagonist holds in esteem her innocence. Indeed, during her confrontation with De Flores, following his murder of Alonzo de Piracquo, she still believes herself a virtuous lady. Despite her scheme, she refuses to acknowledge her fall from grace, and is so shocked to hear De Flores' insults that she wishes she "had been bound/ Perpetually unto my living hate/ In that Piracquo" (3.4.128-130). Thus, the effects of her psychologically coerced surrender to De Flores' desires brings about an intense disruption in her psyche; her core is unsettled.

As she is faced with such an unfathomable reality, Beatrice-Joanna subconsciously veers toward denial as a defense mechanism to preserve her familiar sense of selfhood. This is evident through her continuous negations of her 'sin' and insistence upon her honorable nature, despite acknowledging, in her soliloquy, that she has been endlessly "undone" (4.1.1). Indeed, up to the last scene, during her confrontation with Alsemero, she denies her husband's accusations of adultery, and solely confesses to plotting her previous finance's murder. Maintaining that

To your bed's scandal I stand up innocence,

Which even the guilt of one black other deed

Will stand for proof of: your love has made me

A cruel murderess. (5.3.63-66)

She believes it less harmful to be branded a “murderess” instead of being perceived as an adulteress, despite both deeds being religiously atrocious sins condemned by law and society. As stated by Hopkins, Beatrice-Joanna confesses to “what she clearly sees as the less damaging part of the truth: she confesses to the murder of Piracquo, but continues to deny adultery, revealing the extent to which she has internalized her society's ideological fetishization of female chastity at the apparent expense of all else” (22). Her self-perception is mainly based on her social persona — a chaste and virtuous daughter and wife. The moment that self is disturbed, she finds herself clinging to its memory and illusion. She becomes “divided, diverted, disassembled [and] besides [herself]” (Neely 3). This state of mental (in)stability demonstrates that Beatrice-Joanna continuously blurs the lines between reason and madness.

The female protagonist falls into a state of willful oblivion as she believes her honesty preserved as long as her violation is not publicly exposed. Indeed, her declaration to De Flores: “I'm forc'd to love thee now, / 'cause thou provid'st so carefully for my honour” (5.1.48-49) is indicative of her inner turmoil and unstable state of mind. Her (sub)conscious choice of the term “forc'd” instead of simply proclaiming her love to him demonstrates the character’s involuntary behavior and repressed inner self. Indeed, Beatrice-Joanna thinks that De Flores “provides” for her honor, the very one he has ravaged, through helping her plot against her maid—her substitute in bed with Alsemero. She even tries to convince herself of her newfound affection by stating “how heartily he serves me! His face loathes one, /But look upon his care, who would not love him?” (5.1.70-71). Adam. R. Beach notes that “perpetrators often provide what looks like kindness or favors to abused victims as part of an overall strategy of control” (234). De Flores manipulates her utmost fear of publicly “losing her honor” and being identified as an adulteress to his advantage.

Hence, Beatrice-Joanna's non-normative way of thinking and her altered feelings toward her aggressor find resonance in the traumatic responses experienced by trauma victims.

Beatrice-Joanna's redirection of her involuntary sexual abuse into a peculiar bond with De Flores is a reaction analogous to the modern concept of "identification with the aggressor." According to Zackariah Long,¹⁷ in his investigation of the manifestation of rape trauma in the early modern period,¹⁸ the concept denotes a defense mechanism "whereby a victim of sexual assault responds not by lashing out against their attacker, but instead by internalizing the attacker's feelings of guilt and aggression, blaming themselves" (56). This counter-intuitive response occurs due to the inability of "victim-survivor" to resist their aggressor leading to a different form of manifestation for their "pent-up frustration[...] most tragically onto themselves—" (56). This reaction is manifest in Beatrice-Joanna's post-violation behavior. In the scene following her loss of chastity, Beatrice-Joanna notes that she feels "shame," and believes it righteous for Alsemero to "in justice strangle" her (4.1.14). Moreover, at the end of the play she warns her father not to approach her in fear of "defil[ing] him" (5.3.150). She feels sullied, capable of contaminating whomever comes in close contact with her. Her body is metamorphosed into something poisonous and unsightly. She begs Vermandero to "look no more upon't, /But cast it to the ground regardlessly:/ Let the common sewer take it from distinction" (5.3.152-154). Her body is transformed into a sight/ site of trauma as it reflects not only the physical but also the emotional suffering she undergoes. In this light, Beatrice-Joanna's complex and contradictory behavior can

¹⁷ Long acknowledges that the concept stems from a modern understanding of the concept of trauma; however, he proves in his analysis that early modern writers, on the soul and body, did recognize a number of phenomena that are analogous to what modern psychiatry has identified as "identification with the aggressor."

¹⁸ According to Long, "rape is an act of aggression, whereas rape trauma is a psychological consequence of this act" (55).

be understood as a self-protective mechanism, an attempt to safeguard the foundation of her identity.

Although they each fall under a unique category of mental distraction, Isabella and Beatrice-Joanna are two intriguing examples of how the borders between sanity and madness can intersect. On the one hand, Isabella uses the strategy of dissembled disability, through mimicking the feigned disabilities displayed by Antonio and Franciscus, as a form of self-protection. This tactic renders madness into a tool that enables her to briefly shed her socially pre-determined persona. It also allows her to unshackle the cultural and domestic restraints imposed on her through appearing in the form of a Bedlamite. However, in her state of dissembled madness, the character seems to cross the lines between reason and distraction as she becomes momentarily unable to recognize herself. Beatrice-Joanna, on the other hand, can be categorized as a mad woman in accordance with the Renaissance conception of the term. Indeed, she pursues her desires and defies patriarchal authority, which is enough to brand her mad in the early modern sense of the word. Beatrice-Joanna has an unrelenting attachment to her social identity of chastity and virtue as it constitutes a substantial part of herself. Hence, when that identity is violated and ravished by De Flores, it ignites in her a non-normative behavior and a peculiar thinking process akin to trauma victims. Despite being mostly perceived as foil characters, I have demonstrated that Isabella and Beatrice-Joanna can be read independently from each other while still being equally complex and intriguing personas.

Conclusion

William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1603) and Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling* (1622) are intriguing plays that, when investigated in tandem, divulge distinctive representations of Renaissance madness. My research has focused on the exploration of the process of the manifestation of the distinct types of madness(es) in the three female protagonists of both plays. In Ophelia's case, her non-normative state of mind unravels as the outcome of a series of stressful and traumatic events, the strain of which proves unbearable to the young maiden's psyche. I have referred in my analysis of the character's mental disposition to disability and trauma theory, two modern literary approaches, with reference to the seventeenth-century understanding of madness, in the aim of broadening the collective understanding of the causes triggering Ophelia's mental distraction. Moreover, in the first section of the second chapter, I have drawn on Row-
Heyveld's concept of dissembled disability to analyze Isabella's mad disguise. Emphasis is also placed on the process and reasons causing the materialization of her mad spectacle, which raises the possibility of her crossing the threshold of mental (dis)ability. In the second part, I have investigated the effects of parental authority, domestic space, and ravishment on Beatrice-Joanna's psyche. I have argued that she blurs the lines between madness and sanity in her attempts to preserve her sense of identity as a chaste maiden and virtuous wife as well as in her pursuit of love. Thus, female madness in these plays becomes the result of domestic, gendered, and traumatic experiences. Hence, it is undeniable that female madness in Renaissance drama is complexly intricate and differs between characters depending on the circumstances they undergo. Moreover, the incorporation of the notion of trauma in conjunction with disability has helped shed an innovative light on these early modern literary works.

Although briefly alluded to in my thesis, through the references to the domestic spaces and their possible effects on the characters' psyches, it is undeniable that the notion of space plays a substantial role in both plays. Indeed, place in *Hamlet* and *The Changeling* inhabits the characters just as much as they inhabit it for it has the potential to alter their mental states and self-perceptions. In *Hamlet*, for example, Denmark, being the play's main setting, has an undeniable impact on the psychological conditions of the different characters in the play. This is evident in the various statements that denote the effect the city has on their mental dispositions. To illustrate, Hamlet's melancholy is often linked to the way he feels about his surroundings. He notes that "Denmark's a prison," "in which there are many confines, wards/ And dungeons, Denmark being one o'th' worst" (2.2.240,241-2). Similarly, in *The Changeling* the female characters find themselves restrained and shackled within the boundaries of the domestic space. Hence, a link can be found between the mental dispositions of the characters arguably suffering from mental disabilities and their connection to the socio-geographical settings that they inhabit. Therefore, I believe it substantial to further examine the intertwined relation between space and psychological health in Renaissance drama.

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