

Shakespeare dramatises language primarily through a peculiar language. This characteristic speech is both something and nothing, both coherent and incoherent. Spectators read this language, trying to make 'sense' of it, translating it into the discourse (communication) of sanity. Shakespeare's language of madness is characterised by fragmentation, obsession, and repetition, and most importantly by 'quotation'.

The mad are not themselves. But the voices that speak through them are not supernatural voices, but HUMAN ONES- cultural ones, perhaps.

The prose used for mad speech has disorderly shape, associates madness with POPULAR TRADITION.

These quoted voices have connections with the mad characters' pre-mad gendered identity and history, their social context and psychological stresses- as well as the larger themes of the play and culture. **Laertes: 'A document in madness, thoughts and remembrance fitted'** Ophelia's madness is demonstrated almost entirely through fragmentary, communal, and thematically coherent quoted discourse. She recites tales and songs that ritualize transformation and loss of love, chastity and death.

Quotation in social 'formulas' of greeting and leave-taking: 'well, God dild you' 'good night, ladies, good night'- coherence

Religious formulas of grace and benediction: 'God be at your table!'

Her songs enact rites of passage in life- song of the 'true love'. She sings of valentine's day loss of virginity... 'Then up he rose and donned his clothes / And shut the chamber door, / Let in the maid, that out a maid / Never departed more.'

This imagined 'deflowering' or loss of virginity. The OTHER songs mourn a death. They enable Ophelia to mourn her father's death, enact his funeral, encounter his dead body, and find consolation for her loss.

Ophelia's madness is gender specific but later productions exaggerate this- restless, agitated, shifts of direction... suggests the spasms of 'the mother' and show that madness is exhibited by the body as well as in speech- gesture and speech blend together.

The context of her disease is sexual frustration, social helplessness, and enforced control over women's bodies. The content of her speech reflects this context. Laertes's anguished response to Ophelia as a 'document in madness' 'she turns to favour and to prettiness'

Gender distinctions in the contrasts between Hamlet and Ophelia- scenes featuring both of them. Hamlet's madness is very contrasted with hers, to emphasize the difference between PUT ON and GENUINE madness. His discourse never has the 'fragmented' quality of Ophelia's. The stylistic distinction between Hamlet's feigned madness and Ophelia's actual madness is emphasized by other distinctions. Henceforth in the play, Hamlet is presented as introspective and melancholy, while Ophelia becomes alienated, acting out the madness Hamlet only plays at. Ophelia's madness is somatized and its content eroticized. Hamlet's melancholy is POLITICIZED in form and content. His madness is viewed as politically dangerous; he must be contained and then shipped off to England to be murdered.