

The Dramatic use of Madness

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THE DRAMATIC USE OF MADNESS.

Madness appears with remarkable frequency in the dramas of the Elizabethan age, and a study of just what use or uses it was intended to serve may lead to profitable results in interpreting the plays. So far little seems to have been done along this line. Mr. John Corbin has written a ^{on Hamlet} book to show that "the madness ^{scenes} had a comic aspect now ignored". Prof. Barrett Wendell has said:² "Once for all, the ravings of actual madness were conventionally accepted as comic by an Elizabethan audience, just as drunkenness is so accepted to-day". And again:³ "Only when we understand that King Lear, for all his pathos, was meant, in scene after scene, to impress an audience as comic, can we begin to understand the theatrical intention of the Shakespearian tragedy". Woodbridge, Moulton, Dowden and others have admitted that Mr. Corbin may be right in regard to Hamlet, and Woodbridge and Moulton have accepted Prof. Wendell's view as very plausible in regard to King Lear. Before accepting such unqualified statements of Prof. Wendell, it seems to me desirable that a careful study of a large number of plays be made in order to determine whether his conclusions are entirely warranted. I undertook this study with the intent of controverting his statement, but the farther I investigated and the more I pondered over the subject, the more I was thoroughly convinced that Prof. Wendell was right, and that I was wrong. I have here set forth the results of my investigation.

The object of this paper, then, is, so far as it is possible to do so, to review the entire field, and to show that the ravings

1. *The Elizabethan Hamlet*, by John Corbin.
2. *William Shakespeare*, by Bennett Wendell, p. 294.
3. *Idem*, p. 295.

of madness were conventionally accepted as comic by an Elizabethan audience. The first thing ~~then~~ will be to note what are the peculiar phenomena that awaken the sense of the ludicrous. ^{Then} It will be necessary to study briefly the character of an Elizabethan audience in order to determine what would appear comic to them. Thirdly, the possible origin of the idea of placing madness on the stage, will be considered. Then a number of the minor plays of the period where madness is used will be reviewed. And finally a study of the madness in King Lear is taken up.

Why we laugh, is a subject that has never been satisfactorily treated by psychologists. The best, it seems, that can be done is to note a few of the external phenomena χ that awaken this peculiar sensation in the human being, and to classify these phenomena. When we go beyond this point, and endeavor to determine why such and such external conditions should excite our laughter, we come to pure speculation and authorities differ widely. It is well known, too, that what appears ~~externally~~ ^{extremely} comical to one person, may appear to another in similar circumstances intensely serious. What appeals to one age as comedy, may to succeeding ages be deeply pathetic. All classifications, then, of the causes of mirth must be very general; and all illustrations are dangerous, as the particular illustration given may not appeal to each individual as comical. No one, perhaps, can read through a "funny paper" and see mirth in every thing in the paper that is said.

And yet each thing in the paper must have impressed some one as comical, or it would not have been placed there. In approaching our subject, then, we must keep this in mind: that we cannot judge humor by what seems humorous to us. We cannot say with any degree of certainty that any body of people would or would not laugh at any situation, we can go no further than the probabilities in the case.

But what are the external conditions that provoke laughter? These may be summed up in one word,- incongruities. We are accustomed to see things sustaining certain definite , positive relations to other things; and so in our thought, we unconsciously associate one object or idea with other objects or ideas. These associations are in certain definitely established relations. When these relations are disturbed, the objects appear to us in their new associations as ridiculous- unless, perchance, the new situation awakens our pity, fear or other emotions to such an extent that we fail to see the incongruity. We are accustomed to see a man walk uprightly and we think of him as having his feet down and his head up; so when he is seen down on his hands and knees, it is likely to provoke laughter. But that also depends upon the observer. If there is a feeling of compassion, hatred or some other strong sentiment for the victim the incongruity may not be noticed or the feelings may completely overcome the mirth. Yet again there may be a mixture of feeling. We may laugh and at the same time feel a strong undercurrent of sympathy or pity.

Before leaving this phase of the subject, there is one other important point to be noted; that is, the close connection that seems to exist between our various sentiments, or at least our outward expressions of sentiment. It is well known that the easiest time to create a laugh is immediately after a season of weeping or vice versa. It is often spoken of as remarkable that a speaker can at one minute have his audience in tears and at the next convulsed with laughter. But the only very remarkable thing is, that the speaker can do either. When he has once made his audience either laugh or cry, it is comparatively an easy matter to affect the other. Dramatists have understood this and have used it to good effect in great tragedies and, for that matter, in comedy too.

Since so much depends upon the attitude of the observer, it is necessary in studying the dramatic intent of madness among the Elizabethans to note some of the characteristics of an Elizabethan audience. A mere glance at the customs of the people of Shakespear's time will help us to realize that the race then was comparatively in

its childhood. The people whom Elizabeth ruled were far more crude and uncultured than we usually suppose them to have been. The fact is, that the deeper feelings and finer sensibilities so common to-day were scarcely to be found then.

The mere reading of a detailed description of the amusements of the time is revolting to a person of culture to-day. Bear baiting was one of the great attractions for gentlemen of culture¹. In this sport a bear was chained fast and then tormented by dogs. The dogs would run in and snap at the bear, and then dart away before the bear could get revenge. The clumsy actions of the poor bruin, as in his agony he would endeavor to defend himself or to punish his tormentors was an object of great mirth. If, perchance, a dog would ~~get~~ occasionally get knocked over by a vicious blow of the bear's paw, or receive a severe laceration that incapacitated him for further combat, so much the ~~merrier~~ for the sport. When one dog was exhausted or killed, a fresh one was brought on.² This was kept up until the poor harrassed brute fell over with exhaustion. At one time when Queen Elizabeth entertained the foreign ambassadors seven hours were spent at this delightful entertainment, and the Queen and all the court were present to witness the sport. At the time of the Queen's famous visit to Knilworth bear baiting and bull baiting constituted the principal events of the occasion. Thirteen bears were baited in one day³. Another source of amusement for the gentle folk of that time, and one that helps to throw light on our subject, was the visiting of the mad houses in order to see and hear the raving maniacs⁴. It would seem that on such occasions as weddings or great feasts it was a custom sometimes indulged in to have the inmates of these places brought in the banquet hall that they might dance and howl for the amusement of the banquet-ors.⁵

Such were some of the amusements of the people for whom were written the plays that we are studying. But to go a step farther it ~~will~~ will be well to note a few ^{things} lines which they regarded as fit subjects for laughter. A physical deformity such as a hunch back, a cripple or a dwarf, was regarded as very funny⁴. Ravings of any kind and

1. Bond's Popular Antiquities, Vol. II, p. 396.

2. Strutt, The Sports and Pastimes of the English People, p. 250.

3. Thumby's Shakespeare's England, Vol. 1, p. 136.

4. See notes on Lecture by Dr. Laurence

5. Middleton's "Changeling".

and absolute nonsense were sources of delight¹. Stranger yet, ribaldry and coarseness of all kinds were regarded as legitimate fun.²

The reason why such things appeared in a comic aspect to them may not seem so strong when we inquire into the cause. They saw comedy where we see nothing but tragedy, because they were hardened to sights of blood and suffering; and consequently, their sympathies did not prevent their seeing incongruity wherever it might exist. ~~Today the sight~~ When it appeared, an Elizabethan did not go back in his mind to seek the cause, nor did his imagination dwell upon ^{the feelings of} the person in which the incongruity appeared ~~to him, only as something ridiculous~~. Today the sight of a deformed man awakens our sympathy to such an extent that we fail to notice any incongruity in his appearance. But we seldom see blood, practically never see a man killed. In "merry old England", murder was of almost daily occurrence, even on the streets of London. Public executions were not infrequent³. Inured to such sights, the people were not much moved by them. Men played with death as old soldiers are wont to do. They looked at life less seriously than we moderns do. A man with a club foot or an ape on horse's back, or incoherent language of a mentally deranged person was to Shakspeare's contemporaries very comical. We regard the first with pity, the second with curiosity, and insanity, we look upon as something terrible.

~~There is a great deal of madness on the stage~~

There is a great deal of madness on the stage during this period, and the question naturally arises, why should this be? The dramatists must have had some specific view in mind in presenting such an undue proportion of madmen. In seeking and answer to this question, it may be well to trace, if possible, whence the dramatist got his suggestion for placing madmen on the stage. First, we should look at that form of drama which immediately preceded the regular drama, and from which the drama developed, to see if we may not find a corresponding character. We know that many things about the Elizabethan stage, the clown for instance, had their prototypes in the old

1. Taine's History of English Literature. Book II, Chap. I, Part III

2. Idem. Book II, Chap. II, Part II.

3. Idem. Book II, Chap. II, Part III.

miracle plays. Can we find any thing there that would suggest the madman? I believe we can. Herod and Pilate, as they were represented in the miracle plays, were close akin to the insane. Their chief function, Herods particularly, was to rage and rave. He was not treated as a tragic character at all, but as a comic one. His language, his action his dress, [red gloves, a flowing cloak, a big club in his hands] were all intended to create laughter. He was extremely popular with the audience. The more he raved, the more the people were pleased. When the regular dramatists were producing their plays, and were hunting for every device possible, to make their plays popular and remunerative it is not at all probable that they were blind to the desirability of finding an appropriate substitute for Herod. As lunatics were already regarded by the people as subjects for mirth, and as a lunatic could be made to rave to any desirable degree, it is natural that they should be put on the stage to be the Herods of the drama. For all purposes, the insane person seems to have been a very convenient and a most successful substitute for the old Herod. If then this is the origin of the madman on the stage, it is evident he was introduced for comic purposes. This of course, does not prevent the possibility of the madman's being transformed, in the hands of some of the great masters of art, from a comic to a tragic character. A close study of the plays themselves is the only means of seeing if this ^{was} ~~is~~ done.

Having set forth these ideas, let us proceed, keeping them carefully in mind, to examine some of the minor plays, before approaching one of the two great Shakspearean tragedies in which insanity appears.

In Kyd's Spanish Tragedy there are several scenes in which madness occurs. This is a tragedy of blood of a very pronounced type. ~~What~~ Whether the madness there was intended by the author as comic or merely to augment the horrors, and which effect it produced upon the audience, cannot perhaps ever be definitely determined. No absolute proof can at present be produced on either side of the question. It is my intent to show that there is, at least, a possibility of the passages' having a comic interpretation. Isabella and Hieronimo become mad as a result of their grief over the loss of their son, Horatio, who was murdered by Lorenzo.

After the abundance of blood that has been shed in the earlier part of the play, a modern audience would not be in laughing humor when the mad scenes come on. But the Elizabethan took more delight in blood and horrors of all descriptions. It required more to satiate their desires. Men and women who could find pleasure in watching bear baiting for seven consecutive hours, would not be greatly moved by the tragic events in the early part of this play. They would probably be all the more ready to laugh because of the long spell of seriousness. A laugh would come as a relaxation.

In the scene where Isabella goes mad there are no attendant circumstances to make the situation particularly pathetic or tragic, except the fact that her son had died sometime before. The body is not present, there is no funeral nor grave yard background whatever. Simply Isabella and her maid come on and in their conversation Isabella "runnes lunaticke". Furthermore she is a character with whom the audience is not much acquainted. Previous to the mad scene, according to the earliest edition of the play as given by F. S. Boas, she has spoken just thirteen lines. With such a stranger, an audience, and particularly an audience of the sixteenth century, would have no very deep feelings of sympathy. Hence when Isabella comes on, whatever there may be ludicrous in her mad sayings is likely to call forth a laugh. It seems that her words might have had a comic effect when she says in regard to her murdered son, who was a man and a brave soldier:

"Why did I not give you gownes and goodly things,
Bought you a whistle and a whip stalke too,
To be revenged on their villainies?"

Of course the pathos of the situation prevents the passage from appearing in a comic aspect to a reader of to-day. But would not the

less sympathetic audiences of Kyd note the incongruity in the lines and laugh at it? This would not prevent their being an undercurrent of pity in their minds, even while they laughed.

There is much more of Hieronomo's madness in the play than there is of Isabella's. He does a great deal of ranting and raging. In his speeches he says many things that would probably appear humorous to an audience of that time. That it was so regarded might be judged from the following extract from the play:

(Enter two Portugales and Hieronomo meets them.)

2. You could not tell vs if his Sonne were there?

Hier. Who my Lord Lorenzo?

1. I, Sir.

(He goeth in at one doore and comes out at another)

Hier. There is a brazen caldron fixed by Jove
In his full wrath upon a sulphur flame
In boyling lead and blood of innocents.

1. Ha, ha, ha,

Hier. Ha, ha, ha,

Why ha, ha, ha, Farewell, good ha, ha, ha. (Exit)

2. Doubtless this man is passing lunaticke.⁴

Having noted these indications of a comic intent in the first edition, it is interesting to study the additions that were made to the play in later years. In the Bodleian Quarto of 1602 there are four additions to the play. In each of these the object seems to be to make the raging scenes much more elaborate. May it not be that the reason these scenes were elaborated, and others were not, is that these scenes were especially well received by the audience. Then the dramatist, or dramatists, wished to give the people more off the thing they relished most. But it hardly seems possible ^{that these scenes could have been regarded} as the most tragic in the play, or the most pathetic. It is entirely probable, then, that

/ Boas Ed. Act III. Sc. II. p. 60.

they were received by the audience as comic; and this comedy, set off by awful tragedy, was all the more fetching.

So it would seem that, if comic effect was not the intent of Kyd in writing the mad scenes in the first edition of *The Spanish Tragedy*, that effect may have resulted never the less, and influenced the one who revised the play.

Perhaps, after "*The Spanish Tragedy*", there would be more objection to the comic interpretation of madness in the "*Dutchess of Malfi*" than in any other non-Shakspearian play. Webster is so melodramatic, so somber, so apparently devoid of humor that his plays would be the last place we should expect to see madness used for comic effect. Yet Corbin in his "*The Elizabethan Hamlet*," shows that the mad men in Act IV Sc. 2 were introduced in order to make the audience laugh.⁴ That such was the intent in this case seems certain. But in Act V, Ferdinand, one of the principal characters, ~~himself~~ goes mad. Ferdinand has been a cruel, greedy tyrant, a wholesale murderer. There is something of poetic justice in his end. The murdering of his twin sister drives him mad; he becomes indirectly responsible, ^r though a mistake, for the killing of his brother and copartner in crime, and is finally himself stabbed to death. So beautifully does this all work out that it seems the plot almost requires Ferdinand to go mad, but it would also seem to indicate that the madness was used for tragic effect. So it was to a certain ^{extent} effect but at the same time Ferdinand's actions in the scene where his ravings occur must have created a laugh.

(Enter Ferdinand, Cardinal, Malatesti Bosola, Pescara and Doctor.)

"Ferd. Leave me.

Mal. Why doth your lordship love this solitariness?

Ferd. Eagles commonly fly alone: they are crows, daws, and starlings that flock together. Look, whats' that follows me?

1. *The Elizabethan Hamlet* pp. 58-62.

Mal. Nothing my lord.

Ferd. Yes.

Mal. 'Tis your shadow.

Ferd. Stay it; let it not haunt me.

Mal. Impossible, if you move, and the sun shine.

Ferd. I will throttle it.

(Throws himself down on his shadow)

Mal. O, my lord, you are angry with nothing.

Ferd. You are a fool: how is't possible I should catch my shadow, unless I fall upon't? When I go to heil I mean to carry a bribe; for, look you, good gifts evermore make way for the worst persons."

Ferd. What's he?

Pes. Your doctor.

Ferd. Let me have his beard sawed off, and his eye brows filed, off more civil.

Doc. I must do mad tricks with him for that's the only way on't- I have brought your grace a salamanders' skin to keep you from sunburning.

Ferd. I have cruel sore eyes.

Doc. The white of a cockatrix's eh is present remedy.

Ferd. Let it be a new laid one, you were best.-

Hide me from him: physicians are like kings,

They work no contradiction.

Doc. Now he begins to fear me: now let me alone with him.

Card. How now! put off your gown!

Doc. Now he begins to fear me.- Can you fetch a frisk sir?-

Let him go, let him go, upon me peril: I find by his eye he stands in awe of me; I'll make him as tame as a dormouse.

Ferd. Can you fetch your frisks sir!-

I will stamp him into a cullis, flay off his skin to cover one of the anatomies this rogue hath set i' the cold yonder in Barber Surgeon's hall.- Hence, hence! you are all of you like beasts for sacrifice: there's nothing left of you but tongue and beilley (Throws the doctor down and beats him).¹

To see a man endeavoring to capture his own shadow or to witness the discomfiture of the over confident doctor would almost create a laugh in this day even though the agent be a lunatic. But what is the dramatic value, of a comic scene in this particular place? Here, as in the other mad scene in the play, it comes as a relief for the audience. They have just witnessed one of the most terrible scenes in the whole range of English drama, that of the strangling of the Dutchess. Ferdinand had just looked on his dead sister and had given some intimations that his wits were leaving him. After this blood-curdling scene the audience must have some relaxation before coming to the final catastrophe in which all the remaining characters of importance are to die violent deaths, and yet Ferdinand must not be relieved from his tragic situation. The comic madness answers every purpose. No fate can befall a villian that pleases an audience more than that he should be made ludicrous. Ferdinand's madness makes him ludicrous. This delights the audience, and at the same time metes out to him a terrible retribution for his crimes.

Having disposed of these great plays, the rest is comparatively easy sailing until we come to Shakspear. In Middleton's "The Change-ling" and Dekker's "An Honest Whore," Part II" the mad scenes are so evidently used to promote the comedy, no one will question it. In Dekker's "The Witch of Edmonton," the short mad scene perhaps needs some comment. The main plot of this play is tragedy, but the tragedy is relieved by an under-plot which is nearly all comedy. The mad

¹ Ist. Quarto 1602. Ed. by Sampson, Heath & Co. 1904. Act. V. Sc. 11.

scene is one incident in the under-plot and is almost entirely disconnected from the rest of the story. Through machinations of Mother Sawyer, an old witch, Ann Ratcliffe "runs mad".

(Enter Ann Ratcliffe mad.)

Ann. See, see, see! The man i' th' moon has built a new windmill, and what running there's from all quarters of the city to learn the art of grinding!

M. Saw. Ho, ho, ho! I thank thee my sweet mongrel. Ann Hoyda! a pox of the devil's false hopper! All the golden meal runs into the rich knaves purses and the poor have nothing but bran. Hey derry down! are not you Mother Sayer?

M. Saw. No, I am a lawyer.

Ann, Art thou? I prithee let me scratch thy face; for thy pen has played off a great many men's skins. You'll have brave doings in the vacation; for knaves and fools are at variance in every village. I'll sue Mother Sawyer and her own sow shall give in evidence against her."

After more of such raging, Ratcliffe and country men enter and Ann is picked up bodily and carried off the stage. The whole scene is one which would strike an audience of that time as extremely ludicrous. There is nothing here to mar the comedy. Ann Ratcliffe is a total stranger to the audience. This is ^{the only time she appears during} the entire play. So not particular sympathy for her has previously been aroused in the audience.

In "The Two Noble Kinsmen" by Shakspear and Fletcher, the mad scenes are somewhat difficult to understand. The Gaoler's daughter becomes mad over disappointment in love. She belongs to the under-plot of the story which was probably written entirely by Fletcher. She does not appear in the original story as found in Ch^aucer and was therefore introduced for some special dramatic purpose. Of course she is used as a means of releasing her lover ^{or} from prison, but if that were

all, she need not be carried through the entire play. The general treatment of the character would indicate that she was considered as comic rather than tragic. Her language is such as was considered humorous. There is none of the delightful humor here that is found in Shakspear's other plays, but Fletcher was not capable of doing such work. All his attempts at humor are of a decidedly lower order. The language of the Gaoler's daughter is most of it too vile to quote. May it not be that Fletcher intentionally made it vile in order to appeal to the coarser sense of humor of his audience? Laying aside what appears to us as the pathos in her situation, we find a large amount of humor of the same order that is current in the obscene jokes of the smoking room. If this be granted, it follows naturally that Fletcher makes her mad in order to put this kind of language into her mouth. Prof. Wendell, in his comments on Ophelia, has said ^{to his class} in Shakspear that it is a fact well known to the medical profession that women, even of the most virtuous kind, often use obscene language when they become insane. The vulgarity then, comes naturally from the insane Gaoler's Daughter. At the same time, as has been pointed out, the Elizabethans took particular delight in this sort of thing.

There are other indications that the author did not regard this character as a serious one and that he did not intend that she should arouse the sympathies of the audience. At one time she figures in a morris dance for the amusement of the court. In a morris dance all kinds of antics were performed, and the dancers were grotesquely dressed and ornamented. A touch of pathos here would spoil what might otherwise be made a scene of delightful fun. At any rate, it would be poor taste to have a tragic ^{character} take part in this dance.

Here too, it is noticeable how lightly her madness is treated by the other characters in the play. Gerrold and a number of countrymen are preparing to give the morris dance before Duke Theseus and

Strutt's Sports and Pastimes of the English People. p. 367, also Webster's International Dictionary.

his hunting party. The Gaoler's Daughter comes on singing a song.

Third Countrymen.----- (See page 428.) ^{[Remains of coherent}
_{in not quoting]}

After the dance, it is strange, too, if the author wished Miss Gaoler's Daughter to excite pity, that he does not have some of the court party refer to her in their comments on the performance; but there is not a word in regard to her. None of the characters in the play seem to take the matter of her madness very seriously, except her father and a poor lorn wooer who himself has not much more wit than his crazy loved one. And he may well have added to the comic effect produced by the mad girl.

The plan adopted to cure her of her madness is an example of this. She lost her mind because her love for Palamon, a young nobleman, was not reciprocated. The doctor advises that "Wooer," represent himself to her as being Palamon. The incongruity of an awkward, weakwitted, love-forlorn, low-born fellow trying to imitate the noble Palamon, presents a laughable situation that could be made very affective in the acting.

Another evidence of the light importance the author attached to this character is the fact that he does not give her a name. She is simply known throughout the play as the Gaoler's Daughter. Again, at the end of the play she is dropped with very little consideration. The last time she appears on the stage, she is still a raving maniac. In the closing scene her father reports that "She's well restored, and to be married shortly," and Palamon and other knights send her their purses. This would be hardly satisfactory treatment of her for one who had sympathized much with her in her distress.

What arguments can be presented to show that her madness was introduced for other than comic effect? Perhaps, there are two: One, that the situation of a poor girl going mad because of her love for a man who was beyond her reach is pathetic; the other, that such

'scenes as that of the mad girl wandering alone in the woods and uttering pitiful cries, are not humerous. Both of these statements from a modern view point are true, but from the standpoint of the subjects of James I, for whom the play was written, both are, at least, doubtful. They ^{people} probably were too devoid of sympathy and of the finer sensibilities to see the pathos of the situation, as we see it. Taking away the pathos of the situation, we can easily see the humor in far the larger part of her words and actions. Consider, for example, the following lines:'

G. Daughter. Did you ne'er see the horse he gave me?

Gaoler. Yes.

Daughter. How do you like him?

Gaoler. He's a very fair one.

Daughter. You never saw him dance?

Gaoler. No.

Dauthter. I have often:

He dances very finely, very comely;

And, for a jig, come out and long tail to him!

He turns ye like a top.

Gauler. That's fine indeed.

Daughter. He'll dance the Morris twenty mile and hour,-

And that will founder the best hobby-horse,

If I have any skill, in all the parish,-

And gallops to the tune of "Light o' Love";

What think you of this horse?

Gaoler. Having these virtues,

I think he might be brought to play at tennis.

Daughter. Alas, that's nothing!

Gaoler. Can he write and read too?

Daughter. A very fair hand, and casts himself the accounts

of all his hay and provender; that hostler
Must rise betime that cozens him. You know
The chestnut mare the duke has?

Gaoler. Very well.

Daughter. She is horribly in love with him, poor beast;
But he is like his master, coy and scornful.

Gaoler. What dowry has she?

Daughter. Some two hundred bottles,
And twenty strike of oats; but he'll ne'er have her;
Hellisps in's neighing, able to entice
A miller's mare; he'll be the death of her!

Since, then, the Gaoler's mad daughter was added to the story as told by Chancer, it would seem that she is introduced for comic rather than serious effect for the following reasons; Her language was of the general character that was considered humorous by the Elizabethans, She takes part in a morris dance, Other characters in the play do not take her madness seriously. Their are laughable situations and laugnable passages connected with her madness. And finally, the author does not consider her of enough importance to give^{her} a name or a satisfactory end.

In Ford's, "The Lover's Melancholy" and in "Love's Sacrifice" mad scenes are found. In the first a masque is given by a number of pretended madmen. The author of the masque kindly tells us how it is to be interpreted, and so clears that up at once. /

Palador. The name of this conceit?

Corax. Sir it is called
The masque of melancholy.

Pal. We look for
Nothing but sadness here then,

Cor. Madness, rather,

In several changes Melancholy is the root as well of every apish-frenzy, Laughter and mirth, as dulness."

In "Loves Sacrifice" there is also a pretended madman whom the context clearly indicates should be regarded in a comic light. He is passed around among the courtiers as a valuable present and "a very choice token of love."

But to come to the great play of King Lear: ^{it has} so long has the insanity of Lear been regarded as pathetic in the extreme that it is difficult to study with unbiased minds the scenes wherein the king's insanity is shown. But what argument can be produced in favor of the view that Shakspear intended that Lear's madness should be any thing else than pathetic?

In the first place, it is noticeable that Shakspear deliberately introduces madness into the story, as in none of the sources from which he drew his plot is the king represented as going mad. He must have done this for some dramatic effect. If he intended to make these scenes entirely pathetic, would he run the risk of spoiling it all by bringing in at once, not only a madman, but also a feigned madman and a professional fool- three characters that were almost universally regarded as comic? Furthermore, the scene would be just as pathetic, it seems, if not more so, had King Lear not lost his reason. His sorrow and humiliation would have been much greater could he have fully appreciated his situation, as was the case with Othello for instance. One almost feels glad that his wit does give way under the strain. It is not necessary, then, in order to make the highest degree of tragedy that Lear should become mad.

On the other hand, what is the result if we do look upon his ravings as though intended for comic effect. It does not, I think, spoil the effect of the scenes. In fact, it rather increases their value, from a dramatic standpoint. The first instance of Lear's madness occurs in Act III, Sc. 4. Shakspear in this scene carried

Lear's suffering to the limit of human endurance. He has been cast out by his heartless daughters to breast the fury of an awful storm with no companion except his faithful fool and the disguised Kent. Sympathies for him are wrought up to the highest pitch. To sustain the high strain long is well nigh impossible. There is almost inevitably a let down in the last of this scene; and in scene 6, the farm house scene, there is lower tension. It is necessary for two reasons that this should be so: first our emotions will not stand still when excited- they must continue to increase or they will begin to decrease; the other reason is that the most terrible scene of the play- that of the digging out of the eyes of Gloucester must be prepared for. The action of Lear has reached its climax, and that for a time must become secondary to the action of Gloucester which presently comes to its climax.

The dramatic problem, then, is how to rest the audience for a moment before coming to the Gloucester tragedy, without perceptibly lessening the sympathy for Lear- how to shift the interest from Lear to Gloucester without allowing Lear's experience to suffer an anti-climax. If Lear's mad ravings would provoke laughter, the problem is solved. Laughter would come as a relief to the audience and at the same time would not lessen their pity for the poor king. In fact, it would be a better way of letting the audience down than by allowing them gradually and perhaps consciously to "cool off". A laugh here too, would be the best preparation for the terrible Gloucester scene.

Shakspear's attitude toward Lear's madness may be divined in another way. Some place in these two scenes there must be a dramatic climax in Lear's experience. Shakspear was too great an artist to attempt to hold the feelings of his audience at a certain pitch for so long a time. Where this climax occurs must depend somewhat upon how we are to regard his madness. With a modern audience, to whom

insanity is a terrible thing, the climax will come after his wits are gone- perhaps it would be where Gloster comes to the rescue with his torch or even as late as the mock trial. But with the Elizabethans, for whom the play was written, and to whom madness was not regarded in so serious a light, the climax probably came at the point where Lear goes mad. It seems to be identical with the appearance of Edgar on the scene. That this point was intended by Shakspear to be the "turn" in the play there is no doubt. Here Lear ceases to act for himself and hereafter is utterly dependent upon others. Here he reaches the depths. The hovel, poor as it is, is the first thing to offer shelter and comfort. Here Edgar becomes his ally. In fact the whole turning point in Lear's fortunes comes at the moment where he loses his mind and not later. Since then Shakspear intended this point to be the climax in Lear's career it is likely that he did not expect his audience to weep over Lear's madness; or at least he planned that they should smile through their tears.

It now remains to be considered whether there is anything in the situation or the language that would probably be regarded as comic. It is not improbable that the very situation of Lear ~~himself~~ might have been regarded by the subjects of James I as ludicrous. Their idea of a king was associated with majesty, pomp, power, and to see a king poor, friendless and suffering was an incongruity that may have excited their mirth. Of course, to people of to-day, who are less hardened to sights of cruelty, the situation is all the more pathetic because the victim is a king; but it is possible that the average person of that day so lacked that subtle sympathy that the incongruity would cause him to laugh.

The appearance of Edgar with no clothing but a blanket, and with his raging nonsense ~~was~~ exactly of the nature to appear ludicrous to an Elizabethan audience, and when Lear asks him "Didst

thou give all to thy daughters? and art thou come to this?" the incongruity of supposing this madman ever had any daughter or anything to give to them if he had had any, is sufficient to provoke at least a smile to a modern. The fool emphasizes the incongruity by saying, "Nay he reserved a blanket, else we had been all shamed." When Lear continues to cail this all but naked madman "Noble philosopher," "learned Theban" and "robed man of justice" surely the situation in itself is comic

These mad scenes fairiy teen with passages that are extremely ludicrous, if we can look at them without allowing ourselves to be so far carried away by our sympathies for the king that we fail to note the incongruities; or in other words, if we look at them as the Elizabethans probably looked at them. Only a few of these can be given. Note the ludicrous situation at the imaginary trial, Lear imagines his two daughters brought before him for trial.

"Lear. I'll see their trial first.— Bring in the evidence.—

(To Edgar) Thou robed man of Justice, take thy place;—

(To the Fool, And thou, his yoke-fellow of equity,

Bench by his side:—

(To Kent, You are one o' the commission,

Sit you too," /.

These mock commissioners must be imagined to take the seats assigned. As though it were not incongruous enough to have these two fools sit as judges of a king's daughter, Edgar adds to the incongruity by breaking out with a boysterous song as much out of harmony with the dignity of judge as can be imagined. But the trial goes on. Goneril is arraigned first.

"Fool. Come hither, mistress. Is your name Goneril?

Lear. She cannot deny it.

Fool. Cry you mercy I took you for a joint stool." /.

The fool here, as he does throughout these scenes, seems to point out the incongruity. He is acting as judge and speaks with the authority of a judge, and yet calls the imaginary prisoner at the bar "mistress." The humor in the last line is obvious.

The trial continues, with the wild incongruity of Lear punctuated and emphasized by the wit of the Fool and the nonsense of Edgar, until Lear falls asleep.

Certain comic ^{phases} ~~plans~~ of the situation are worked over and over. The favorite one, perhaps, is Lear's delusion in regard to Edgar, the blanket-clad madman. Besides those already referred to there is one more that must be inserted. Lear says to Edgar: "You, sir, I entertain for one of by hundred: only I do not like the fashion of your garments:

You will say they are Persian attire; but let them be changed."

After Lear is worked off the stage by means of his madness, he does not appear again until Act IV, Scene VI. His infirmity has reached a new stage, but he still raves, and his ravings still have a comic aspect, in spite of the moralizing that ~~is~~ occasionally appears. He discourses on the subject of adultery. This, as the loose talk of the Gaoier's Daughter, would probably sound humorous to the auditors of the first Lear.

Lear meets the blind Gloster.

"Glo. O, let me kiss that hand!

Lear. Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality.

Glo. O ruin'd peace of nature! This great world

Shall so wear out to naught.- Dost thou know me?

Lear. I remember thine eyes well enough.

Dost thou squiny at me? No, do thy worst, blind Cupid:

I'll not love,- Read thou this challenge."

That a joke could be made on the blindness of ~~King Lear~~ ^{Gloster seems} sums al-

most incredible in the twentieth century. Yet after all, to laugh at a madman's remarks about a blind man is not so barbarous as finding sport in bear baiting. And surely there ^{are} is the elements of humor in Lear's saying, "I remember thine eyes," when Gloucester had no eyes, and in his calling old Gloucester "blind cupid."

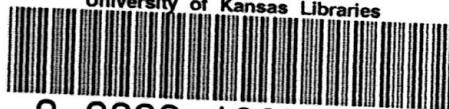
Humor in this scene is perhaps not as nearly essential as it seems to be in Act III, but it is desirable here. It is a fitting preparation for act V and the final catastrophe of blood.

The reasons then, briefly stated, for believing the madness in Lear had originally a comic aspect are: There was no madness in the sources from which the play was taken; It was not needed to increase the tragedy or pathos; hence it may have been for humor. Humor is desirable at the places in the play when the madness occurs for the dramatic reasons; it is a convenient way of disposing of Lear in act III, and of preparing for the horrors that follow the mad scenes. The scenes themselves have much of the comic element in them.

Having taken this general survey, what are the conclusions we have reached? Eminent scholars have stated that the ravings of madmen on the Elizabethan stage were for comic effect. No one has raised to dispute it. It is accepted that the basic element of all humor is incongruity. But what is humorous to one is not necessarily so to another. It is necessary to study the people and their source of amusement in order to determine what would likely be regarded as laughable to them. Such a study of the Elizabethans shows that they were cruel, hardened to sights of suffering, and far less sympathetic than men of to-day. They regarded all kinds of deformity as fit subjects for laughter and particularly madness. A study of the plays shows that in the mad scenes incongruity abounds, in them also there is much obscenity and other qualities particularly pleasing to Elizabethans. We find also in them much that would appeal to people to-day as hum-

orous if they were less sympathetic. In some of the plays, as *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *King Lear*, we find madness deliberately thrust into the story, or as in *The Spanish Tragedy*, we find the mad scenes enlarged, after the plays are written. In every instance there seems to be no need of this, unless it be done for comic effect. In many plays, as in *The Dutchess of Malphi* and *King Lear* humor seems desirable for the dramatic action. In other plays, as *The Witch of Edmonton*, *The Changeling*, and *Love's Sacrifice*, that the madness was intended to be comic, is obvious. In a few plays, as *The Lover's Melancholy*, the author's inform us that the madness is, "root of laughter." Taking these things into consideration the conclusion seems justifiable that the dramatic use of madness on the Elizabethan stage was to produce laughter.

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