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## Otherring Beings and Being's Other: A Comparative Study of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* in Terms of Levinasian Ethical Self

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**Abstract:** The renaissance and the postmodern era provide two interesting periods for discussion. The renaissance can be viewed as the early modern period prefiguring the contemporary world. Thus, the two aforesaid periods can be connected to one another. This comparative study discusses two works: one from the early modern period and the other from the postmodern world. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1603) and Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* (2000) provide the material for a discussion on the treatment of the Other as conceived by the philosophy of Levinas in his *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1978). In the spirit of brevity, the central events of the plays and the most suggestive dialogue are discussed. One of the most pertinent concepts in Levinas' ideology is responsibility which is required for the transcendence leading to subjectivity. It is concluded that while in Shakespeare the unethical mostly die, thus ending their torment, the fate that awaits Kane's characters is much more dire; they are left battered and bruised, corporeal shells of Beings, paralyzed in time and unable to transcend Being towards the Other. As such, it is seen that the postmodern treats unethical Beings much harsher compared to the early modern.

**Keywords:** William Shakespeare; Sarah Kane; Responsibility; Subjectivity; Transcendence.

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## **1. Introduction**

Otherness is a sensitive subject best handled with care. Kearney states that “ever since early Western thought equated the Good with notions of self-identity and sameness, the experience of evil has often been linked with notions of exteriority” (65). Hence, the Other gets immediately shunted to the other extreme of the Good/Evil spectrum without due process. Kearney elaborates further noting that otherness was seen as estrangement contaminating “the pure unity of the soul. Strangeness was thought to possess our most intimate being until, as Macbeth’s witches put it, ‘nothing is but what is not’. Evil was alienation and the evil one was the alien”; the aforesaid view of the Other is still quite relevant in contemporary times and recent decades with examples ranging from “Kristallnacht and Auschwitz, the Soviet show trials and gulags, Mao’s cultural revolution and Tiananmen Square, McCarthy’s blacklists and Reagan’s Starwars, the embargo of Cuba and bombing of Cambodia, Sarajevo and Kosovo” in addition to “the Twin Towers and Afghanistan” (65). The concept of Otherness does not just appear in the political paradigm. Barker observes how the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw Simone de Beauvoir draw upon “the Hegelian treatment of the master/slave dialectic” then pivot “her analysis around precisely” the concept of Otherness “in asking why it is that woman stands as other to man and other to culture more generally” (98). Emanuel Levinas believed that the treatment explicated thus far regarding the Other was the result of a traditional view of ethics that relied on the consciousness. Conscious deliberation on ethics becomes inextricably linked with self-interest which Levinas opposed as it only led to destruction. As such, Levinas conceived of an ethics that was not rooted in choice or conscious awareness of the Other, but based on a perpetual responsibility for the Other resulting in being for the Other. Levinas viewed the Other as existing beyond Being and the sole route for gaining subjectivity.

Levinas’ ideas regarding the Other provide a suitable point of comparison for the two time periods in question. To understand why the comparison being made in this study is apt, Stephen Greenblatt, who was influenced by postmodernism, is instructive. Greenblatt claimed 16<sup>th</sup> century man began changing his identity to suit his environment, and gave the Renaissance the moniker of “early modern period” saying Shakespeare’s creations displayed hints of modernity indicating that the “period involved a forward-looking attitude that prefigured our own modern world” (qtd. In Brotton 16-17). The fact that people altered their personality during the renaissance speaks of an inward-orientated consciousness pointing to individuality. When one considers that the

postmodern populace was also infatuated with the individual, it becomes reasonable to place the early modern beside the postmodern when analysing Otherness. Considering that it was with the Renaissance that people started to move towards a concern for individuality, one would find it difficult to find another period that would be more suitable for comparison with the postmodern. For example, Jacob Burckhardt believed that the Middle Ages was defined by a “lack of individual awareness” (qtd. In Brotton 11) meaning it does not prefigure the modern world. Furthermore, notable thinkers such as Theodor Adorno and Michel Foucault believed that the “civilized values they identified as originating in the Renaissance had little response to or were even possibly complicit with the catastrophes of the political experiments of Nazism and Stalinism and the horrors of the Holocaust and the Soviet Gulags” (Brotton 17); these points provide other examples of connections between the early modern and the postmodern. These points validate a need to compare Shakespeare and Kane to debate in what way the early modern period heralded the postmodern regarding the Other. The Self/Other dichotomy is dealt with differently; Shakespeare ends his characters’ suffering, while Kane leaves her characters in a seemingly endless state of anguish.

The abovementioned accentuates the dissimilar conceptions of the *otherwise-than-being* in the two plays. The difference in portraying the Other hints at the shifting viewpoint regarding the face-to-face with the Other as one progresses from Shakespeare to Kane, from the early modern to postmodern plays. Saunders connects one of Kane’s plays with Shakespeare saying that “one of the key ideas that governs both *King Lear* and *Blasted* is the relationship established between acts of personal cruelty and the full-scale chaos and atrocities that arise out of civil war” (71); this aptly links Shakespearian thought to Kane’s ideology, and relates a need for an inquiry regarding the Other’s approach which can be inspected in *Hamlet* and *4.48 Psychosis*. *Hamlet* sees the main character feign madness to drive a plot of revenge, whereas in *4.48 Psychosis* the main character genuinely suffers from mental anguish in the shape of a psychological disorder. As such, the early modern manipulation of mental problems versus the very real psychological trouble of the postmodern provide a tangible point of comparison. It is of paramount importance to discuss how subjectivity and responsibility are illustrated as well as Levinas’ other concepts. The ultimate aim is to come to a conclusion regarding how characterization differs in the plays as far as the Other is concerned. The texts are analyzed to investigate the concepts of transcendence and subjectivity, and whether or not the Other is treated in accordance with Levinasian ideas.

## **2. Review of Literature**

Rostami and Mortazavi mention that “Levinas generally sees the Other as a ground for the realization of the Self. He does not want to dissolve the Other to the Self to reach unity”, and they stress that for Levinas the “absolute Other that he mentions cannot be overpowered or controlled; therefore, it is impossible to define the Other in terms of the Self”; in the Levinasian school of ethics Otherness is seen in a positive light (137). These points provide a very telling and substantial point for the discussion at hand. The aforementioned ideas on Otherness illuminate the discussion of the plays, particularly the encounter with alterity. Meihuizen explains that Hamlet’s “encounters with alterity free him momentarily from the ‘now’ of his ego – his initial meeting with his father’s Ghost, the initial revelation of the impossibility of annihilation in the ‘To be’ soliloquy, his brief glimpse of Ophelia as empathetic other” (129). In *Hamlet*, the aforesaid characters afford the prince the opportunity to escape the limit imposed on him by his own consciousness; the fact that he plots against his enemies stops him from acting ethically towards his friends, and certain relationships like his relationship with Ophelia are sacrificed. Thus, the moments that he comes face to face with the Other become even more influential. To further understand the intricacies of the portrayal of the Other in Shakespeare one could focus on Wehrs’ claims. Wehrs explains that in Shakespeare’s plays “love of the same for itself” which Levinas relates to the “opposite of ethics, seems to characterize not just the psychology of sociopathic loners such as Edmund, Iago, and Richard III, but also to breed tainted, diseased forms of sociality”; he goes on to elucidate saying that Shakespeare points to suggestions of conatus (preserving and enhancing one’s loves as well as well-being) being inherent in one’s nature which shows how he can be related to Levinasian ideas as Levinas viewed conatus as the opponent of existing and responsibility for the other (203-204).

Having briefly discussed the depiction of the Other in Shakespeare, it is necessary to look into Kane’s treatment of the Other. Soncini states that Kane's work is “peopled by characters charging towards their death, and usually encountering it in scenes of Grand Guignol excess and grotesque violence featuring spectacular displays of torture, body mutilation and dismemberment”, and that she shows death as the “ultimate, irrevocable and unredeemable act of self-annihilation” (116). Therefore, based on Levinasian ethics, the characters lack the responsibility toward the other. Although, it has to be said that it is usually much more complicated than the aforesaid. In order to delve deeper into the contact with the Other in Kane’s work, it is advisable to consider her views. Kane, after *Blasted* had debuted, stated there is not “anything you can't represent on stage. If you are

saying that you can't represent something, you are saying you can't talk about it, you are denying its existence" (qtd. in Urban 39). Kane's take on the controversial once again draws a parallel between denying reality and the contact with the other. Denying the existence of something is reminiscent of pushing away the face of the other which calls on Being to be responsible for its past, present and future. These insights display a need to discuss the treatment of the Other in works of these two writers. More crucially, the importance of the present study lies in that it bridges a gap between two completely different times when discussing the changes that the proximity of the Other goes through as one moves from the early modern to the postmodern.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

Levinas' ideas regarding the Other provide useful insights into the minds of the characters of the two plays in question; they help when investigating the motives of the characters as well as how they view the Other and his approach and needs. Certain notions of Levinas' ideology are informative. Proximity is explained as that which cannot be thought of as a state, instead one has to conceive of it as "a restlessness, null site, outside of the place of rest. It overwhelms the calm of the non-ubiquity of a being which becomes a rest in a site" (Levinas 82). Manderson states that the Levinasian conception of proximity indicates a phenomenon which is central to who people are, and it is this singularly fundamental marvel that is the reason one has a responsibility towards the Other; it is "something which furthermore cannot be reduced to logic, knowledge or rules. Proximity is an experience, emotional and bodily, and not an idea. Incarnate in us all" (698).

Another concept is transcendence: "to be or not to be is not the question where transcendence is concerned" but it is the Other, "the otherwise than being", that manifests a difference which is the difference belonging to the beyond-being, the very difference attributed to transcendence (Levinas 3). Levinas states that the "breakup of identity, this changing of being into signification, that is, into substitution, is the subject's subjectivity, or its subjection to everything, its susceptibility, its vulnerability, that is, its sensibility"; thus, subjectivity can be viewed as "locus and null-site of this breakup", and it becomes a "passivity more passive than all passivity" (14). Thomas elaborates on Levinasian ideas by explaining that for him the various types of "literary expression of evasion or the desire for transcendence" are indicative of the desire and absolute need to "escape the basest realities; to break with social convention; to be liberated from the body, or to search for the wonderful or sublime" (11). Thomas' musings illustrate yet another facet or understanding of the idea of transcendence which is mentioned as an evasion or escape.

Sensibility is another useful concept. The idea of sensibility is also quite informative forming part of the basis of responsibility for the Other. To make clear the idea of responsibility, Levinas holds that “The freedom of another could never begin in my freedom, that is, abide in the same present, be contemporary, be representable to me. The responsibility for the other cannot have begun in my commitment, in my decision” (10). The aforementioned aptly sums up the burden many of the plays’ characters shun thereby being unable to gain subjectivity as it is situated within the absolute responsibility for the Other.

Chinnery and Bai argue that Levinas’ conception of “unconditional responsibility for the other” can only become acceptable if one looks at ethics in such a manner that would make it impossible to view beings as “fundamentally self-interested autonomous individuals” (229), which yet again points to the undeniable notion that one’s chance to prosper can only be reached through rejecting one’s innate need. Responsibility is not connected with the consciousness. However, with the introduction of the third party, who “interrupts the face to face of a welcome of the other man, interrupts the proximity or approach of the neighbor”, justice begins requiring conscious thought (Levinas 150-157). Wolcher believes that ethics and justice “owe their very existence to this vast sea of suffering” because “in a world without the possibility of suffering ... actions and states of affairs would never be felt as affronts, and the curative and redemptive powers of ethics and justice would have no occasion to cure or redeem anything” (98). This idea of suffering is a running theme in Levinas’ ethics, and as such, it becomes pivotal when discussing responsibility and justice. Be it the suffering that Being goes through involuntarily to expiate for the Other and gain subjectivity, or the suffering of the Other that Being is responsible for with being its cause, the concept informs much of the ideology being discussed.

These complex, interconnected concepts inform the discussion on the characters’ treatment of their respective Others. Through the aforesaid one can hope to delve deep into minds and figure out how treatment of the Other changes from Shakespeare to Kane.

## **4. Analysis**

### **4.1. Summary**

*4.48 Psychosis* presents the reader with a character troubled with psychological issues. She feels betrayed by everyone around her, most of all by her doctor. She loathes every single person she sees as she believes that they judge her without knowing her. Hence, she cannot get close to anyone let alone make a meaningful connection with another

human being. The only person she lets in, the doctor, keeps her at a distance while being quite cold towards her treating her as just another patient. The play is presented mostly through the inner thoughts of the main character with no real plot to speak of. By the end of the play, the main character is left in a sort of limbo on the brink of vanishing.

*Hamlet* tells the story of the prince of Denmark whose father has mysteriously passed away. His father's ghost comes to him speaking of foul play regarding his death which sets Hamlet down a path of revenge as he suspects his uncle, Claudius, has murdered his father. To make matters worse, Claudius marries Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, to further destabilize Hamlet's mental wellbeing. Hamlet feigns madness to be better able to carry out his vengeance. However, for all his strategizing and meticulously cunning plans, his plans go awry when multiple characters perish as a result of his actions; the collateral damage includes Ophelia, a woman he was fond of, and her father Polonius, as well as Gertrude. As such, while he does manage to take down Claudius, he is responsible for the death of numerous and relatively innocent bystanders.

#### 4.2. Extreme Other and Extreme Being

The two plays resort to extremes when portraying Being and the Other. In *Hamlet* one is faced with a ghost whereas in Kane's play one comes across characters stripped of part of their identity as they are not named at all with the dialogue appearing to float on the page unbound. Hence, there are examples of wondrous depictions of the encounter with the Other. Starting with *Hamlet*, it can be seen that Marcellus relates Horatio's attitude toward the Ghost of the deceased king:

**Marcellus:** Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,  
And will not let belief take hold of him  
Touching this dreaded sight, twice seen of us.  
Therefore I have entreated him along  
With us to watch the minutes of this night,  
That if again this apparition come  
He may approve our eyes, and speak to it.

**Horatio:** Tush, tush, 'twill not appear. (Shakespeare 1.1.23-29)

Horatio belief that the ghost is part of the guards' imagination is equal to a rejection of the face-to-face with the Other. Furthermore, the description of "touching" the dreaded "sight" twice lends corporeality to an encounter which should be seen as being beyond the physical were it to be considered ethically; the mere fact that the ghost

can be considered as completely Other based on its different nature should attest to the need of considering it ethically and easily recognizing it as alterity. However, the wonder the ghost incites in the characters, mainly Horatio, fools them into trying to bring it into a totality with Being instead of it being seen as infinity. The words “touch” and “sight” prove the “sense” in question is not a case of being-for-the-other, but a very physical manifestation of the need of Being to return to its own essence by experiencing everything as part of itself. Levinas states that the “other in the same determinative of subjectivity is the restlessness of the same disturbed by the other” (25). As such, trying to bring alterity into touching distance with Being is countercurrent to Levinasian ethics. Finally, Horatio says the ghost will not appear which is evidence enough that he has no qualms about rejecting this extreme Other.

Being continues to exhibit selfishness. With regards to Being's stasis within itself, Barnardo's description of the ghost as “the same figure, like the king that's dead” (Shakespeare 1.1.41) speaks volumes. The Other is supposed to have the effect of tearing Being from its essence and interest and pushing it toward subjectivity making it unique through responsibility. Yet, in his description, Barnardo has managed to turn ethics on its head by splitting the ghost from the corporeally dead king essentially dividing the Other's Being. Hence, there is an attempt to rebuff the ghost which then turns into an attack on its Being through a difference being attributed to the spirit of the king and his physical body that is of lesser importance. Horatio then swears that he “might not believe Without the sensible and true avouch” of his own eyes (Shakespeare 1.1.55) calling the ghost an “image” (Shakespeare 1.1.81) of the king. Equating the sensible with the truth is not in line with ethics as the sensibility Levinas mentions is concerned with being at the mercy of the pain the Other doles out. Nevertheless, Horatio is once again referring to the ghost with the use of words such as “image” that connote the physical. As such, the inability to respond to the call of the Other is not something occurring only once as multiple instances can be found.

Kane's play also depicts the Other in the most extreme manner. In *4.48 Psychosis*, Kane presents a character unnamed; in this sense, compared to *Hamlet*, the play presents Being as the extreme example. The character expresses certain emotions, later saying that she is guilty and being punished (Kane 4). Essentially, Kane is depicting a character so engulfed in emotions that she no longer feels, mentioning that she has “lost interest in other people” (Kane 4). The aforesaid might seem selfish, yet one gets the inkling that it does not tell the whole story as she is aware of some kind of guilt, and this indicates she is a just person. Additionally, as the play progresses, one could reasonably state that



the cause of the woman's apathy towards others is a direct result of how she was treated. The fact that she utters "I cannot be alone I cannot be with others" (Kane 4) insinuates that while she cannot respond to the call of the Other's needs, she is not mired in her own ego either. Hence, it would seem that while she has lost any hope for subjectivity, this is not a result of drowning in Being's essence; on the contrary, the limbo she is experiencing is probably the product of being shunned as an Other. She goes on to say that she is depressed as a result of her undeniable mortality so she is going to kill herself (Kane 4). The aforementioned reaction to her eventual death shows that she has not understood death as gaining meaning through the Other be it through sacrifice or otherwise which connotes an unethical nature. Having said that, the role of the environment on her questionable thoughts is undeniable.

The rejection the woman faces from her surroundings in *4.48 Psychosis* is decisive; the awareness portrayed by the woman when she says that some will call her "self-indulgent" while some will understand the "simple fact of pain" (Kane 5) indicates that these are the words of the Other that has been rejected so unanimously that she is the only one left which would of course make the matter of ethics a moot point. For Levinas there is an "insistence on difference as absolute, and on the irreducible quality of the two beings known as I and Other" with the Other not "socially constructed" or defined by "discursive power" but an "unassimilable and unknowable alterity" (Todd 69). One can therefore see why the woman is an Other turned unethical; she has been stripped of her name and identity, she has been rejected completely to the point of becoming apathetic toward other Others, and she sporadically wishes for death. Yet, at other times, she mentions that she does not want to die. The aforesaid highlights the notion that perhaps she does garner hope for an ethical future as shown later on in the play through her concerted effort to communicate. Whether it is the extreme alterity depicted in *Hamlet*, or the rejected unnamed Other of *4.48 Psychosis* which can be viewed as a Being because it is from their view that the events unfold, unethical behavior permeates the interactions so completely that any hope for someone, anyone to take responsibility is snuffed out.

### **4.3. The Shamelessly Unethical**

It might be reasonable to think that if a person is unethical, they might come to resent themselves, yet Claudius is so arrogant that he feigns sensibility when he speaks of the former king:

Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death  
The memory be green, and that it us befitted  
To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom  
To be contracted in one brow of woe,  
Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature  
That we with wisest sorrow think on him,  
Together with remembrance of ourselves.  
Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen,  
Th'imperial jointress to this warlike state,  
Have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy,  
With one auspicious and one dropping eye,  
With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,  
In equal scale weighing delight and dole... (Shakespeare 1.2.1-13)

Claudius saying that the former king's memory is fresh in his mind, then opposing discretion with nature and connecting sorrow to wisdom betrays his inner Being as an entirely selfish. Claudius' Being is so entrenched in the interest of his own essence that he is unable to see those around as anything more than tools to achieve his nefarious goals. His marrying of reason and emotion shows his calculating and manipulative ego that is fully complacent in itself to the point of no return exemplified by his unwillingness to employ sensibility of the kind Levinas describes. Claudius is so self-centered that he explicitly verbalizes the vicious cycle of returning to oneself in line 7 which, when taken with the words describing his deceased brother, paints a mightily ominous image of the unethical character that he is. The effort to bring everyone into touching distance with the same, i.e. himself, does not end with his poor brother as he mentions his engagement to the widowed Queen as a "defeated joy" yet again balancing supposed grief and triumph. Claudius, perpetuates the theme of balancing self and the Other in such a manner that speaks of his unethical nature; he uses the metaphor of one eye being happy and the other sad which in itself metaphorically speaks of the perceived undesired nature of the Other as bringing pain that is detrimental to Being even though this should be seen as the Other bringing subjectivity. At times Claudius skillfully swaps the places of the positive words with the negative which perfectly portrays the balancing act, an *act* that is largely skewed toward the self once one considers the upcoming events which reveal Claudius' true nature. As such, the mention of equality in line 13 is quite ironic as there is no concern with equality in Claudius' Being.

Claudius' shameless nature does not abate. Levinas believes that "the moral significance of language so conceived lies in a form of sensibility, a sensible 'exposure' or 'vulnerability' to the other person, older than language itself" (Hendley 153-154); this does not bode well for Claudius as he employs language in a manner that shows he is detached and cool in the face of the loss of a family member, and in no way do his words show any vulnerability with regards to the Other. Hendley describes the language Levinas is concerned with as a "form of proximity to the face of the other" (157); yet, not only is the face of the Other missing in the scene (as a result of Claudius' murderous greed no less), but language is used to manipulate the situation foregoing the rights of the deceased in deplorable fashion.

Shameless Beings of Claudius' ilk also overwhelm ethics in Kane's play. It was mentioned how the protagonist of *4.48 Psychosis* had been turned into an unethical Being as a result of being shunned as an Other by those around her; the shameless nature of the manner through which the aforesaid had been achieved is explained by the main character when she says:

A room of expressionless faces staring blankly at my pain, so devoid of meaning there must be evil intent.

Dr This and Dr That and Dr Whatsit who's just passing and thought he'd pop in to take the piss as well. (Kane 5)

If the main character is taken as the Other, the fact that the faces staring back at her are blank all the while not willing to internalize her pain in themselves and mocking her, all point to the unethical nature of the surrounding populace. Those around her keep her at a distance which is symbolically shown through the physical gaps on the page between the descriptions; the fact that the proximity of the Other is disregarded has been expertly shown. The faces show no sensibility or responsibility detached from will; quite on the contrary, instead of being for the Other without question, they actually portray "evil intent". As such, it becomes almost impossible not to view this behavior as reprehensible and unethical. She goes on to say that:

And I am deadlocked by that smooth psychiatric voice of reason which tells me there is an objective reality in which my body and mind are one. But I am not here and never have been ... Watching me, judging me, smelling the crippling failure oozing from my skin, my desperation clawing and all-consuming panic drenching me as I gape in horror at the world and wonder why everyone is smiling and looking at me with secret knowledge of my aching shame. (Kane 6)

The voice of the other Being is mentioned as being the voice of reason which proves there is to be no hope of ethical behavior. Furthermore, it seems by trying to force the main character to embrace objectivity, they are actively attempting to entice her toward the unethical. There is mention of the preference for the mind and body to be one which is exactly the description of the return to self that can be seen as resulting from a complacent ego; yet, the main character says that she is not there indicating a detachment from herself all the while portraying that she is different to the others and perhaps more ethical.

Unethical behaviour is exhibited continuously by those surrounding the main character. The others in *4.48 Psychosis* have, as can be gleaned from the extract above, skipped over responsibility for the Other and proceeded straight for justice through judgment, failing in that as well. The main character, however, shows signs of ethics as she is engulfed by the wonder of coming face to face with the Other. However, while the main character is exhibiting sensibility through vulnerability and emotion, the others are using a secret knowledge in a degrading manner. As such, it is seen that there is no shame in rebuffing the Other be it where family is concerned like Claudius, or the relationships portrayed in *4.48 Psychosis*. As Caro states “In a world of many neighbors there arises the question of justice. This requirement of judgement is inevitable and is in addition to assuming the great responsibility for the Other” (676), but it seems that for the characters discussed, there is no burden at all, neither of responsibility nor justice, as they simply prefer the matters of the self.

#### **4.4. Shirking Responsibility**

Having discussed the nature of Claudius, it is best to now consider Hamlet whose behavior is informed by the treatment he and his father receive from Claudius. Hamlet cannot fathom how easily Gertrude moves on from the king's passing exclaiming “frailty, thy name is woman”, and “O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason Would have mourned longer - married with my uncle” (Shakespeare 1.2.146-151). Hamlet believes even an animal with no understanding of reason would have experienced grief for a longer period than his mother did; therefore, his words show that she does not even have the requirements for traditional ethics. Furthermore, it appears no justice is afforded Hamlet by Gertrude as she does not think about the consequences of marrying his uncle and the detrimental effects it would have on him. As such, one could be forgiven to pity Hamlet because he is surrounded by unethical Beings even though he himself does plot and manipulate as he is hellbent on revenge. Hamlet then says he saw his father in his “mind's eye”, and that he “shall not look upon his like again” (Shakespeare 1.2.185-188).

The mind's eye is reminiscent of how Levinas explains Being should view the Other, that is to say not to focus on the physical aspect; this illustrates that Hamlet was at some point quite mindful of ethics, but much like the main character of *4.48 Psychosis* that ethical inclination is snuffed out. His assertion that he will not look at others in the same manner again proves that the events after the death of his father have made him unable to treat the Other responsibly.

The ill treatment of responsibility is evident in *4.48 Psychosis* much like Shakespeare's play. The main character relates that:

... it's not losing you that hurts me, but your bare-faced fucking falsehoods that masquerade as medical notes.

Your truth, your lies, not mine.

And while I was believing that you were different and that you maybe even felt the distress that sometimes flickered across your face and threatened to erupt, you were covering your arse too. (Kane 6)

Yet again, proof is provided that the only thing that matters in these unethical paradigms is the self; the doctor is accused of putting on a face and being less than genuine in his treatment, presenting superficial "falsehoods" as empathy. The aforesaid leads to the main character detaching herself from the Other because Being did not treat *her* as the Other responsibly. The word "too" at the end of the sentence indicates that the multitudes around the main character are the same as this particular doctor, they are uncaring, selfish, and apathetic. People who only care about the perseverance and perpetuation of their own essence and ego cannot hope to be for the Other which is precisely the point the main character is alluding to.

Amidst the unethical multitudes, a point of vindication for the woman in *4.48 Psychosis* manifests itself when she says that she blames herself (Kane 8). Despite the awful treatment she has been subjected to, she holds herself culpable as well; she does not blame others entirely which at least illustrates some measure of ethical consideration that is heightened when one considers the circumstances of her dismissal by society. Crewe states that the "infinite, irrecusable asymmetry" of the requirement to "substitute our responsibility as a replacement for any responsibility of any Other, axiomatically reveals ... that blaming is a form of violence, in that it occurs in the absence of the blamed as subject, rather in the way of a trial absent the defendant: it subjects the 'soul' of the Other to erasure" (14). Crewe's understanding of blame based on Levinasian ethics shows that for once a character has returned to self not for selfish reasons, but to

investigate the cause of her plight rather than putting multitudes of Others on trial in their absence. Hence, the aforesaid is of paramount importance as it has occurred so rarely. As such, be it the doctors in *4.48 Psychosis*, or Getrude, Laertes, and Polonius, no one displays any hint of responsibility except perhaps toward the self.

#### **4.5. Corrupted Ethics**

When the Ghost first appears to Hamlet, he displays trepidation about its intentions; Marcellus does not seem dubious about the Ghost's appearance ("Look with what courteous action"), yet immediately refutes this by telling Hamlet to not follow it. However, Hamlet says that he will because he does not fear for his soul or value his life even though Horatio exemplifies the troubles the ghost could lead him to (Shakespeare 1.4.41-74). The sad truth of these exchanges is that even though the characters show instances of taking responsibility, like Marcellus being in awe of the ghost rather than fearing it completely or Hamlet accepting its summons, all are nonetheless negated almost immediately as the intentions of the characters becomes clear. Clearly "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (Shakespeare 1.4.90): the moral status of the characters. Even Hamlet's order, "as a stranger give it welcome" (Shakespeare 1.5.165), only offers short-lived hope for the sudden appearance of ethical behavior. The irony is noticeable when Hamlet implores Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to "Come, deal justly with me" (Shakespeare 2.2.262) considering that there is no justice or ethics to be found. Rhodes mentions that ethics is an "out-of-balance relationship – one that puts the other person first in the name of generosity, respect and humility. Ethics is a kind of giving without taking or expecting anything in return" (1319). Nevertheless, both the reader and Hamlet know full well that even though, for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the relationship is indeed out of balance, it leans heavily towards themselves and not the Other.

The behavior exhibited by the characters in Shakespeare's play is aptly summed up by Hamlet in his famous speech when he exclaims that "conscience does make cowards of us all" (Shakespeare 3.1.83); these words are extremely laden with meaning regarding ethics as Levinas believed that the encounter with the Other should not be weighed down with considerations of conscience, rather it should be embraced without forethought, logic, or reason to the point of sacrificing the self. Hence, Hamlet's words point to corrupted ethics as everything is tied to knowledge such as the various intrigues the characters are embroiled in. Hamlet further explicates on corruption telling Ophelia that:

I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves all, believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. (Shakespeare 3.1.122-126)

Hamlet understands full well that the world is corrupt when speaking of sexual promiscuity. Additionally, he knows he is culpable as well. Yet, even with this knowledge he cannot act ethically as all considerations of ethics are gone which is why he condemns himself as well as others.

In Kane's play there is an awareness of the corruption of ethics much like Shakespeare's. The main character's assertion in *4.48 Psychosis* that "I have reached the end of his dreary and repugnant tale of a sense interned in an alien carcass and lumpen by the malignant spirit of the moral majority" (Kane 9) proves, like Hamlet, she is aware of her own culpability yet can conceive of no remedy as the "malignant spirit of the moral majority" simply does not allow a return to ethical considerations; the society is so morally corrupt that there is to be no salvation for anyone. Her sarcastic words regarding others indicates the corruption that has taken hold of everything. Even the closest person to her feels nothing (Kane 9), so this rejection is another example of the rejection of the Other. The biblical allusion "the names of offenders shall be shouted from the rooftops" (Kane 20) illustrates the woman's belief that there is no salvation to be found in religion either as the corruption has polluted the minds too comprehensively that even religion is not ethical; hence, there is no good, which means there is no ethics.

Lingis' explanation can be helpful to further understand the role of religion in the encounters with the Other in Kane's play:

"Illeity, this movement of infinity, Levinas names God. Sacred. in a literal sense, it is the transcendent instance that contests and judges being. It is the Good that calls unto being and to expiation for the wants and faults of being. Here God figures ... as judge and as imperative which calls us into question ... God is there uniquely where manifestation is disturbed by alterity, in the one that addresses me. (xxxiii-xxxiv)

Hence, when God is questioned, Good no longer holds power thereby negating the awakening caused by the Other; so, when something that is supposed to ensure the Other being received ethically is questioned, there is no room for ethics to prosper. Furthermore, Cohen states:

Morally hearkening to the height or good that beckons in the other person's face turns out to be Levinas's way of speaking about being drawn upward by and to the divine ... the diagonal dimension of morality, the call beckoning in the height of the other, the self's asymmetrical and one-way relation to the other, one-for-the-other, is the "to-God," the very dimension of divinity. (188)

Therefore, the criticism of religion (“Christ is dead and the monks are in ecstasy” (Kane 20)) can be seen as the definitive reason why there will be no movement toward the Other, the good, as the prerequisite for it is rejected as being corrupt and unreceptive of the Other itself. There are numerous examples of morally corrupt characters in the two plays some of whom try to justify their unethical actions thereby further proving their corrupt nature. Hamlet is unaware of the collateral damage his intrigues cause, and the characters in *4.48 Psychosis* are not ethical even though by the very definition of their profession (doctors) that is exactly what they are supposed to be. Hence, all are lost completely in an immoral wasteland.

#### **4.6. The Fate of the Unethical**

It is quite telling and ironic that both Gertrude and Hamlet accuse one another of offending the deceased king (Shakespeare 3.4.9-10) when they both are guilty of treating each other unethically; Hamlet’s vengeful rampage hurts multiple Others affording no justice to the third party, and Gertrude, through her hasty marriage and naivete, disregarded Hamlet’s state and failed to see Claudius for the irresponsible, unethical person he really is. As such, neither is in a position to be pointing fingers. Additionally, not only is Hamlet unaware of the requirements of true ethics, but he also believes it his duty to make the Other understand who they are which is shown by him telling Gertrude “You go not till I set you up a glass Where you may see the inmost part of you” (Shakespeare 3.4.19-20); this forceful return of the Other to her ego is not the remit of responsibility or transcendence as it can be viewed of the reduction of the Other. In fitting fashion Hamlet then slays Polonius to not only indicate indirectly that Polonius has received his just reward for his manipulative behavior, but also show his own irresponsible behavior which puts the blame of multiple deaths firmly on his shoulders.

As Edelglass observes, “for Levinas suffering is essentially without meaning and thus cannot be legitimized; all suffering is evil ... No explanation can redeem the suffering of the other and thereby remove its evil” (44); whether we consider Hamlet’s single-minded approach, Gertrude’s naivete being destructive, or Claudius’ greed even though it is accompanied by questionable remorse, no amount of rationalization and reasoning can justify the lives destroyed in the wake of the characters’ irresponsibility. The fact that the ghost can only be seen by Hamlet when it reappears indicates the interconnected ties of irresponsibility between the characters; Hamlet allows a ghost he had questioned the intentions of earlier to guide his words against his mother, and Gertrude does not believe Hamlet and calls him mad driving him to a stronger frenzy. It appears that nobody is to become ethical; even having killed Polonius, Hamlet still presses on with his destructive plans of revenge.



The following exchange further illuminates the discussion regarding the fate of unethical Beings in *Hamlet*:

**Claudius:** At supper? Where?

**Hamlet:** Not where he eats, but where a is eaten. A certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet: we fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service, two dishes, but to one table; that's the end.

**Claudius:** Alas, alas.

**Hamlet:** A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.

**Claudius:** What dost thou mean by this?

**Hamlet:** Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar. (Shakespeare 4.3. 18)

Hamlet's clever metaphor is not just an ingenious way to insult the king, for one can take his ideas to mean that all are unethical Beings, and not even the guise of a king can save someone from being chained by his ego. The fate Hamlet envisions for a king akin to the fate of the beggar is one where death has little meaning as they both become worm food; there is no mention of the life preceding it, so the lack of ethics has wasted lives. In typical fashion, Claudius proves he has not changed by becoming king because he tells Laertes that the reason he did not punish Hamlet was because of Gertrude and the love the public show Hamlet (Shakespeare 4.7.9-19). It is reasonable to say neither motive is ethical as they both point to fear as the defining factor.

In the convoluted relationships of Shakespeare's play, no matter how hard one tries, there can be found no proper reaction to the wonder of coming face to face with the Other. Hence, when Laertes says "I am justly killed with mine own treachery" (Shakespeare 5.2.287), one is left to wonder whether any justice has really taken place. All the Others and Beings, regardless of which is taken as which, kill one another in one fell swoop, and as Horatio aptly sums up "They bleed on both sides" (Shakespeare 5.2.284); justice if it really was justice would not allow for this kind of outcome. Even the forgiveness exchanged between Hamlet and Laertes means little as there is no salvation for them or those they neglected.

The fate of the unethical is similarly grim for the characters of Kane's play. The main character in *4.48 Psychosis* sums up the fate of the unethical when she says that she can see herself but when she is "charmed by vile delusions of happiness" she cannot touch her "essential self" (Kane 21); as happiness is gained from the Other and the Other cannot be found, she cannot gain subjectivity, so she cannot escape her ego. The aforesaid is backed up by further comments such as "to increase self-regard", "to have control and influence over others", "to vindicate the ego", "to avoid pain", "to be accepted", "to draw close and enjoyably reciprocate with another", and "to form mutually enjoyable, enduring, cooperating and reciprocating relationship with Other, with an equal" (Kane 25). All the aforesaid clashes with the Levinasian conception of ethics as the ego should be cast aside, reciprocity should not be a concern, and pain should be welcomed. Hence, the lack of ethics is astonishing yet predictable because, as mentioned before, all who inhabit the play are guilty of being unethical.

The characters proceed to perpetuate the idea that they are fated to be unethical. The main character of *4.48 Psychosis* is at times quite unethical like the others, so she cannot really be counted as being apart from them. Responsibility for the Other, expiation for the Other, vulnerability in the face of the Other, and other concepts find no expression in the action of the characters and their encounters with the Other. The doctor says:

I know you'll be okay because I like you and you can't like someone who doesn't like themselves. The people I fear for are the ones I don't like because they hate themselves so much they won't let anyone else like them either.

But I do like you. I'll miss you. And I know you'll be ok. (Kane 26-27)

The numerous instances the doctor refers to himself indicate an obsession to draw everything into himself thereby embodying the unethical self-indulgent ego. As such, he is unable to accept the friendship of the patient and rejects her because of his belief that she will be alright despite the rejection of her as the Other. The doctor essentially Others the main character by saying he needs his friends to be sane compounding the rejection of the Other. Leahy states that "If there is a locus for the divine in Levinas it is not the self but the Other, and if there is such a locus it is no localizable, worldly, locus" (176). Yet, for the doctor there is only ego, only self, thus no divine, hence no Other; everything is becoming a part of self, drowning like Being in the paralyzed ego.

Interestingly unethicallity does abate sporadically. One can remove some blame from the main character in *4.48 Psychosis* as she mentions that there is "no way to reach out

beyond the reaching out I've already done you will always have a piece of me" (Kane 27); if one considers her as the Other, she has been rejected so much that there is no point to connect with others, and if she is seen as Being, she is not making a concerted effort to draw everything and everyone into the totality of sameness thereby not being unethical, yet not entirely ethical either. The fact that the other character is mentioned as having a piece of her insinuates a sacrifice which is yet again an example of being-for-the-other. She then wonders "how have you inspired this pain? ... my mind is torn by lightning as it flies from the thunder behind" (Kane 28). The main character talks of the pain inflicted by the Other indicating a part of Levinasian ethics, and one can symbolically view the thunder from behind as the place where responsibility for the Other takes root which should not be equated with the past. As such, the main character embodies aspects of ethics. Yet, ideas such as "I wish you'd left me alone" (Kane 28) foreshadow a less than enviable fate as a result of the partial rejection of the Other.

It should be noted that unethicity never truly fades away. As one moves towards the conclusion of Kane's play, the unethical aspects come to the fore; the woman says "behold the Eunuch of castrated thought ... a solo symphony" (Kane 30) which portrays the concern for the self. When she says "I'm dying for one who doesn't care I'm dying for one who doesn't know you're breaking me" (Kane 31) she insinuates that there is a sacrifice on her part, but bemoans the fact that it is not reciprocated. The aforesaid would be unethical were it not for the fact that there is no conception of ethics in the world of the play; having been treated so badly, the main character cannot reasonably be held accountable for moments of frustration. Even taking into account the abovementioned, the main character will be punished through a lamentable fate. The complicated workings of the mind of the main character lead to convoluted ideas about ethics. However, her partially ethical nature cannot be discredited as she mentions "in death you hold me never free" (Kane 33) proving that even in death she is for-the-other. Ultimately, because the main character was never fully ethical, she is left in limbo with no subjectivity gained: "It is myself I have never met, whose face is pasted on the underside of my mind" (Kane 35). Hence, the characters in Hamlet face death as a result of their unethical behavior, while in Kane's play the characters are stuck forever in a limbo of their own making wishing for death which is a fate far worse than the release of meaningless death that Shakespeare's concoctions receive.

## 5. Conclusion

The first point of discussion between the two plays was the extremity of the examples of Being and the Other. Whether discussing the appearance of the ghost of the former king

in *Hamlet*, or the unnamed thus disembodied main character of *4.48 Psychosis*, the notion of the extreme depiction was evident. Regarding the ghost, Marcellus and Horatio were reluctant to believe its existence thereby rejecting the Other and intimacy of the Other's face; Barnardo escalates matters further by suggesting a dual nature regarding the ghost and the former king's physical body thereby splitting the Other's Being. Lawrence mentions Macbeth's encounter with Banquo's ghost, and reminds the reader of "Shakespeare's use of specters to show the return of presence in negation" (37); the same occurrence take place in *Hamlet* with the ghost representing the appearance of death, or in other words, the presence and negation. Therefore, the extremity of the Other finds immense importance which is then denied by the other characters. In *4.48 Psychosis* the main character is presented as an extreme example of Being as she has no name thus having a questionable identity, whereas in *Hamlet* the Other occupied the extreme form. The fact that the woman cannot stand herself or Others illustrates she is stuck in a limbo of neither being for oneself nor for the Other. Hence, through the extreme Being and Other, the lack of adherence to ethics, responsibility, being-for-the-other, and justice is illustrated as almost all characters are concerned with their own interests.

Having seen that the characters are practically inherently unethical, it is perhaps not surprising that they feel no shame for snubbing the Other and his call to responsibility. Claudius is calculated, apathetic, and possesses a conniving and manipulative personality; he does at times feel something akin to shame, but this still does not dissuade him from treachery thereby proving it is not true shame. The main character of *4.48 Psychosis*, it was claimed, had been shunned as an Other quite shamelessly which leads to her unstable condition. Therefore, the lack of ethical considerations toward the multitude of Others and the ensuing lack of justice toward the third party becomes the norm. The shameless attitude toward unethical acts leads to responsibility for the Other being overlooked. The aforesaid is seen when Gertrude's rash nuptials incense Hamlet as his mother did not consider his feelings, and also when the main character in *4.48 Psychosis* is treated with "falsehoods" which is yet another instance of the lack of responsibility. Therefore, for one reason or another, the characters are wallowing in a world that is incapable of responsibility. The abovementioned lack of responsibility leads to any semblance of ethics seeming corrupt. For example, Marcellus accepting the ghost's appearance or Hamlet following it may seem responsible acts, yet they instantly act in a manner that negates responsibility; Marcellus tells Hamlet to refrain from following the Ghost, and Hamlet follows it because he does not fear for his life not out of a sense of responsibility. Knap, when discussing Hermione's statue coming to life in *The Winter's*

*Tale*, observes that the final scene of the play and the opening scenes are in conflict; Leontes' rash response to Hermione and Polixenes' relationship and his final acceptance of her coming back to life show that Leontes' irrationality can only be remedied through divine intervention and not through a suitable reaction to the Other as some have claimed (253-254). As such, much like the treatment of the Ghost in *Hamlet*, which is at times positive and at others rather harsh, there is no redemption for the characters even if they do sporadically act responsibly. The main character in *4.48 Psychosis* accepts some culpability yet cannot find a remedy thus exemplifying a corrupted notion of ethics. None of the above lead to expiation for the Other proving the characters are unethical.

All the abovementioned points set up the plays for the portrayal of the fate awaiting the unethical. The point of the discussion was to examine how the early modern unethical ego is depicted as compared to the postmodern. The analysis showed that, for Shakespeare, the unethical characters were put to death which was almost always the result of their manipulative, inconsiderate, and unethical behavior, such as Polonius being killed while spying on Hamlet, Laertes being stabbed with his own poisoned sword and so on. For Kane, in *4.48 Psychosis*, the main character is left all alone in eternal limbo unable to connect with an unethical world with the characters finding no resolution or happy ending. Arguably, it can be claimed that the fate the unethical experience in Kane's play is a far more violent one, even if only symbolically, because they are left as corporeal, empty shells of unrealized Beings with no hope of achieving anything close to subjectivity. In contrast, the Shakespearean characters are at least afforded the release of death even though it is a meaningless demise. Having said that, there are still many examples of emotional violence towards the main character in *4.48 Psychosis* as well as physical distress that she was subjected to by the doctors. In death, the Shakespearean characters signified nothing which ends their plight, but Kane's characters live on to perpetually signify nothing and serve as a cautionary tale.

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