

# Van Gogh's Ear for Music: Psychoacoustic Deafness in Hamlet and New Individualism

Saadia Noor<sup>1</sup> and Ali Inan<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

This qualitative study of the psychoacoustic deafness prevailing in Shakespearean tragedy Hamlet applies a Jungian psychoanalytical approach in relation to systematic musicology and new individualism. Elsinore's psychoacoustic deafness to the melodious notes of Ophelia and ignoring the due value of sound is a reason for the tragedy that befalls the royal family. The city is a deaf conglomeration of an incapacitated community struggling between reason and problematic aspirations. The madness, melancholy and frenzy are mere symptoms of an underlying disease – psychoacoustic deafness. Neither the protagonist nor the antagonist could hear, play the right note, or use music as a diplomatic tool to avert the looming tragedy. The recent surge of new individualism suffers the same inability to utilize music for finding order amidst the neo-colonial global anarchic structure. Elsinore, like an idiomatic Van Gogh's ear for music, deliberately deprives itself of the ability to discern and acknowledge the constructive powers of music. The play manifests how music could avert tragedies, and how ignoring it could result in several socio-political catastrophes in a new individualist world.

**Keywords:** Music, Van Gogh's Ear, Hamlet, Psychoacoustic, Deafness, New Individualism

## Introduction

Jung says, "from now on music should be an essential part of every analysis" (Kroeker, 2019, p. 8). It may prove true for psychoanalysis in literature as well. Literature, like music is an art that often relies on metaphors, images, and symbolic representations. Music itself serves as a symbol and a metaphor in literature. Its presence has indicated the healing power referred to by Kroeker as "Archetypal Music Psychotherapy" (p. 29). Whereas, Jung wrote, "music expresses in sounds,

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of English, Riphah International University, Lahore – Pakistan

<sup>2</sup> Department of English, Government College University, Lahore – Pakistan

what fantasies and visions express in visual images” He further asserts “music represents the movement, development and transformation of motifs of the collective unconscious” (p. 10). Furthermore, Gilman points out “in nineteenth-century Vienna” the debates pertaining to the psychological power of music “influenced how Sigmund Freud and then psychoanalysis shaped a double understanding of listening as cure and music as evidence for the unconscious” (Gilman, 2018, p. 2). Nagari also hints at this interrelationship of music and the labyrinths of mind while stating, “Psychoacoustic research has always attempted to find direct and/or indirect relations between music phenomena... and the mind” (Nagari, 2013, p. 13). Therefore, the absence of music or its lack of value represents the psychoacoustic deafness of a community extending from the labyrinths of the collective unconscious. Such psychoacoustic deafness is well hinted at by the usage of an idiomatic expression ‘Van Gogh’s ear for music’. The background to the idiom is that the painter Van Gogh cut his ear off; this idiom is a pun to refer to being tone deaf or anyone who cannot comprehend musical tone or differentiate between musical tones. Similar Psychoacoustic Deafness prevailing in Elsinore drives the crisis in the Shakespearean tragedy of Prince Hamlet. The unheard songs of Ophelia, the Dumb show, lack of reference to music in Elsinore, and the constant instructions to silence are like that of the music repellent, radical, extremist societies in the neo-colonial world. Gilman further states that “defining music and listening come to be keys to claims about psychoanalytic treatment as well as evidence for a universal theory of the psyche” (p. 11). This universal theory of the psyche prompts an investigation of those societies that are grappling with the tragedies extending from insensitive and non-aesthetic approaches towards music and suffer from an inability to avert or resolve those conflicts. The post-cold war transition to unipolarity and then an intense conflict towards a resurgent multipolarity has given birth to new-individualist socio-political order where the human existence has been torn apart by both the external and internal conflicts. The crisis prevailing in Hamlet and the conflicts emerging in music decadent societies today share a Van Gogh’s ear for music because of the lack of understanding for rhythmic tones and ignoring melody.

## Review of the Literature

In the history of literary tradition, no other work elicits more interest than the enigmatic tragedy of Prince Hamlet. The interest stretches from the treatment of the character, its psychological consistencies and inconsistencies, the craftsmanship of the playwright, and even the psychological truth that lay hidden in the language

and setting of the play. Furthermore, the variety of criticism available on the Shakespearian tragedy of Prince Hamlet has not only evoked multifarious approaches and responses to the play, but also questioned the criteria for the criticism, as suggested by Morris Weitz (1965), "much critical dispute and disagreement are not only about the application of established criteria for concepts but involves fundamental debates over the criteria themselves (Weitz, 1965, p. X). It is indeed striking what Marlowe (1592) had suggested in *Dr. Faustus* of a human potential that "stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man" (Marlowe, 1592, l.i. 60), Shakespeare (1603) presented the gravest explanation of that immense capability in Hamlet. Hence, it is here that the philosophy of literary criticism found its infinite capacities to explore its highways and investigate the by-ways as well. It brings us to a reality that Hazlitt (1826), in his essay *On Reason and Imagination*, suggested resides in the mind.

Psychoanalytic critics have advocated an unconscious conflict which caused Hamlet's indecisions. Freud (1900) concludes in his *The Interpretation of Dreams*, that Hamlet has an Oedipal desire and the subsequent guilt results in his indecision. While Ernest Jones (1949) suggests "Hamlet's hesitancy lies in some unconscious source of repugnance to his task" (Jones, 1949, p. 127). This also hints to one of Jones's two assumptions that Hamlet's delay is reflective of a state of Freudian Psychoneurosis. His other assumption is that all drama esp. Hamlet represents the real actions of life, therefore, the patterns of human behaviour dramatized are subject to the laws of psychology that are applicable to real life behaviour. He expresses the idea that "characters are created whose impersonating representatives act and move on the stage, and we are the stage, and we are asked to believe that they are living persons..." (p. 17). However, in Lacan's analysis Hamlet unconsciously takes on the role of phallus-the cause of his inaction-and is increasingly distanced from reality. On the other hand, J. Dover Wilson (1935) challenges such approaches and calls them an attempt of "sticking it (Hamlet's character) in a doll's house of their own invention (Wilson, 1935, p. xlvi).

Jungian criticism of Shakespeare's characters extends from the four major archetypes: persona, shadow, anima, and the self. The Jungian critics of Shakespeare's Hamlet emphasize that the absent traits of the outer attitude are found in the inner attitude of characters. Matthew Fike remarks that in Hamlet's case the mask is an intellectual one and the anima reacts to the persona. Another feature in Hamlet is the role of the shadow in the psyche, and one must integrate it

to embrace the anima (Fike, 2011, p. 112). Fike also provides an understanding of individuation in Shakespeare's plays esp. Hamlet. Chung-Hsuan Tung has pointed out that the character of Gertrude, as an unfaithful wife, represents the "fatal woman" in our collective unconscious. Furthermore, Hamlet's death represents the "the death of a trinity" along with his two fathers in the aftermath of him being torn between his Super-Ego and Id or shadow, under the influence of anima. (Tung, 2007, p. 20)

The Jungian tradition also opens the road to a musical or acoustic study of Shakespearean drama. Study of music and acoustics in Hamlet serves as a road to tracing the origins of conflict and the missing force of resolution in Hamlet. The missing healing function was an evident root of persistent internal and external conflict in Hamlet. If the problem was psychoanalytic in nature, the healing power must have laid in a psychotherapy. "All the creative art psychotherapies (art, dance, music, drama, poetry) .... can trace their roots to Jung's early contribution" (Smith, 2017, p. 1). Jung had come to believe later in his life that music had therapeutic significance. Smith also mentions that "Jung provides a way in which to approach the tension between conscious and unconscious intention in improvisation, a problematic tension which pervades clinical thinking in music therapy" (p. 18). Music has had a significant impact on the multiple adaptations of Hamlet both in theatre and film. Kendra Preston Leonard (2009), in *Shakespeare, Music, Madness* has discussed that several adaptations of Hamlet have relied on music to communicate the essence of the play, For Instance, Leonard states, while discussing Grigori Kozintsev's (1964) film adaptation of Hamlet, "... The music that represents Hamlet's mind provides audiences with the understanding..." (Leonard, 2009, p. 73). The online blog "Music and Madness in Shakespeare's Plays" posted that "madness and music often go together in Shakespeare's plays.... while sublime music could create universal concord, out of tune or discordant music could have a negative effect. If a person's internal harmony was disturbed, or their mind full of discord, it could mean that they had lost their senses" (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust 1). Ophelia refers to Hamlet's madness "Like sweet bells jangled, out of time and harsh... Blasted with ecstasy" (Shakespeare, 1603, III. i. 173-175).

Additionally, Bertoldi, et.al (2004) suggest that "within much post-colonial criticism, psychoanalytic theory occupies a crucial place as an explanatory procedure" (Bertoldi et. al. 2004, p. 238). However, there exists a tension between the psychoanalytic criticism and post-colonial approach. The primary concern is

that psychoanalytic criticism is too euro-centric for a post-colonial perspective. Yet, the psychoanalytic study in a colonial perspective point that "... Hamlet is a 'symptom' of the shift to the modern..." (p. 254). Furthermore, Sach (1935) suggests, that "the situation which occurs in Hamlet is common to all humanity" (Sach, 1935, p. 177).

In the sphere of music and Shakespearean studies, Sternfeld's (1963) seminal work, "Music in Shakespearean Tragedy," published by Routledge and Kegan Paul, offers an in-depth exploration of the role and significance of music within the tragic plays of William Shakespeare. This comprehensive study is part of the Routledge Library Editions series and is notable for its meticulous historical, literary, and musical analysis. Sternfeld delves into the Elizabethan opposition to song in tragedy, the integration of music into the dramatic structure, and the specific use of music in Shakespeare's tragedies, such as the "Willow Song" in "Othello" and the gravedigger's song in "Hamlet." The work also contrasts Shakespeare's use of music with that of his contemporaries, highlighting the unique ways in which Shakespeare employed music to enhance the emotional and thematic depth of his plays. Sternfeld's research is supported by extensive bibliographical references and illustrations, making it an invaluable resource for scholars interested in the intersection of music and literature in the early modern period (Sternfeld, 1963, p. 17-42).

Bruce Johnson (2018) highlights that Hamlet has been transformed through its canonization, often being experienced primarily as a printed text rather than a performed work. This shift fundamentally alters its interpretation, as Shakespeare originally crafted his plays for sound, aiming to engage audiences familiar with intricate auditory cues. Originally, Hamlet creates a dynamic acoustic setting, with dialogue, instrumental music, and songs playing integral roles in conveying meaning. Seeing the play through the lens of its acoustic elements allows for a deeper perception of its temporal and cultural background. This approach not only grounds the work more firmly in its historical soundscape, but also challenges modern readings of Hamlet's procrastination. Johnson suggests that the auditory dimensions of the play reveal his hesitation not as a flaw to be solved but as a deliberate reflection of the transitional knowledge systems of Shakespeare's era. Reclaiming the play's sonic qualities invites a reinterpretation that aligns Hamlet's indecision with the epistemological uncertainties of the early modern period (Johnson, 2018, p. 257-267).

Furthermore, McKenzie C. Alons (2018) highlights the underexplored field of symphonic poetry as a lens through which the relationship between music and literary texts can be examined. Originating in the mid-19th century with Franz Liszt, symphonic poems—or tone poems—translate literary ideas into concise orchestral compositions, offering fertile ground for analyzing the semiotic interplay between the two art forms. Alons’s study focuses on Shakespeare’s Hamlet and Liszt’s Symphonic Poem No. 10 (“Hamlet”), presenting this pairing as a case study for the broader musico-literary relationship. This approach uncovers a niche that intersects various disciplines, including intertextuality, semiology, musicology, literary criticism, and neuro-philosophy. By synthesizing insights from these diverse fields, the study offers a novel perspective on how literary narratives and musical structures interact, bridging gaps between literary critique and musical analysis while deepening our understanding of their complementary dynamics (Alons p. 2018, 1-4).

### **Theoretical Framework**

In 1956, Carl Jung met Margaret Tilly, a music therapist. Jung told her that he considered musical therapy as trivial and emotional. However, after meeting her and reading her papers, he had recognized music’s connection with his notion of active imagination which he thought had the healing power that resided in the unconscious mind and was manifest in the creative products of conscious activity of the mind. Active imagination, Jung says as quoted by Patricia Skar, “could be done in any number of ways, dramatic, dialectic, visual, acoustic, or in the form of dancing, painting, drawing, or modelling” (Skar, 2002, p. 632). Acoustic power of music is, hence, the product of active imagination capable of healing the conflicts arising out of collective unconscious. Skar (2002) further states, “playing the instruments, like active imagination in general, could also be seen as a ‘waking dream’. The music produces the emotional dynamic stimulus that helps to unfold the situation which the unconscious wishes to reveal to the conscious mind” (p. 635).

While dealing with the study of the unconscious, Carl Jung coined the term ‘collective unconscious’ that marks the difference between Jungian Psychoanalysis and Freudian Psychoanalysis. Freudian Psychoanalysis deals with the ‘personal unconscious’, a term coined by Jung for Freudian unconscious, located between the exterior and the interior world. Jung considered it a surface layer of the more influential ‘collective unconscious.’ Jung (1929) wrote, “The existence of the collective unconscious means that individual consciousness is... not immune to

predetermining influences... quite apart from the unavoidable influences exerted upon it by the environment” (Jung, 1929, p. 112). Jung (1936) stated in a lecture that collective unconscious “consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes” (Jung, 1936, p. 43). Jung underscored four of the many archetypes he outlined, namely, persona, anima, shadow, and the self. Persona is the public face, anima is the mirror image of the biological self of the person and bipolar and can one moment appear positive and negative the other moment, shadow is, whereas the storehouse of both the creative and destructive powers, and the self is an individual’s attempt at self-actualization. Jung supplements his approach with the concept of ‘individuation’, which he considers as a process of renovating the psyche by bringing both the collective and the personal unconscious into conscious. Individuation carries a universal therapeutic effect. It is in fact a process of maturity and makes an individual distinct from the general.

In this backdrop the theory of new individualism needs a correlated study. It “comprises four core dimensions, an endless hunger for instant change; a fascination with social acceleration, speed and dynamism; and a preoccupation with short termism and episodicity” (Elliott, 2013, p. 190). New individualism deals with a process of continual reinvention. Furthermore, new individualism permeates life at cultural and institutional level. The approach outlines life ranging at psychic and emotional level. Here new individualism coincides with Jungian psychoanalysis. However, there is some difference between new individualism and individuation. New individualism is related to self-alienation whereas, individuation is akin to self-realization. There is an evident pretence of loneliness in several manifestations of new individualism.

### **Analysis of the Psychoacoustic deafness in The Tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark**

The Tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark opens in a hushed setting shrouded in mystery. The Tragedy of Hamlet introduces the spectator with a lull. There is not even “a tempestuous noise of thunder and lightning heard” (Shakespeare, *Tempest*, 1612, I.I). Instead, there is “not a mouse stirring” (Hamlet I.i. 11). There is no Orsino to say, “If music be the food of love, play on; Give me the excess of it” (*Twelfth Night*, 1602, I.i.1). Rather the action of the play takes place in a setting where “the whole ear of Denmark, is by a forged process... rankly abused” (Hamlet 1603, I.i. 43-45). Hence, Elsinore is a place where the ear lacks the sense of hearing; whatever is heard is either an incomplete voice or a deception. These are the initial indicators of a

psychoacoustic malady that ails Elsinore. Moreover, Deutermann (2011) suggests in his essay “Caviare to the general? Taste, Hearing and Genre in Hamlet”, “that Hamlet could be accused of .... absurd attention to ears” (Deutermann, 2011, p. 2).

Significantly, it is not the absence of music that ails Elsinore, instead, it is the inability to comprehend the notes of music that plagues Denmark. Perhaps, in Elsinore, even the flute of Prospero would have remained unheard, as the songs of Ophelia are not understood. Ophelia pleads that her song may be heard, “Pray you mark” (Shakespeare, 1603, Hamlet, IV v. 40). While Ophelia sings her refrain, “White his shroud, as the mountain snow –” (IV. v. 41), the Queen does not pay much attention to the song. However, Gertrude’s response to that is not of a listener but that of a viewer. She asks Claudius to look at Ophelia instead of listening to her song replete with pathos. “Alas, look here, my lord (IV. v. 42). When the king interrupts Ophelia, she insists that her song may be heard. “Indeed, without an oath, I’ll make an end on’t” (IV. v. 62). Afterwards, the king asks to keep a watch on her. Without any reference to listening to her, Claudius orders, “Follow her close; give her good watch...” (IV. v. 79). It seems that like Hamlet’s feigned madness, Ophelia’s supposedly genuine madness also contains a method in it. While singing she, significantly, highlights the folly of the silent mourning that has haunted Elsinore throughout the play, and claims that all mourning has been wasted. “And we cast away moan” (IV. v. 221). Ophelia suffers due to a lack of empathy proceeding from the Psychoacoustic deafness in Elsinore. In fact, “Ophelia is not insane, but traumatized” (Goodson, 2010, p. 1). Perhaps, Ophelia’s songs were an attempt at using musical notes as a Jungian therapy, which a psychoacoustic deaf society of Elsinore required, collectively.

Elsinore’s response to music and songs appears like that of any music repellent society undergoing new-individualist transformation in the post-cold war world order. Hence, the malady that ails Elsinore is no different from the psychoacoustic deafness issuing from a new individual crisis. Doubleday (2007), while discussing the politics of music in Afghanistan correlated gloom with the loss of heart for music that “in such grim circumstances, many people simply lost the heart for music” (Doubleday, 2007, p.280). Similarly, the sorrow that had engulfed Elsinore created a barrier to all the joys of the world, including music, as Hamlet laments that “How (weary), stale, flat and unprofitable, Seem .... all the uses of this world” (Shakespeare, 1603 Hamlet. I: ii. 137-38). Even the “sitting still” is in expectancy of an action that “foul deeds will rise” (I, v. 279). This represents the characteristic new individual

crisis due to a fascination with social acceleration, speed and dynamism reflected in short termism and episodic instances.

The character of Hamlet undergoes a similar new-individual crisis. Although Hamlet's ear for music is not entirely tone deaf like rest of the Elsinore, yet it is no different from Van Gogh's ear for music. Hamlet's Psychoacoustic deafness lay in his failure to comprehend the difference between musical tones. Hamlet represents "hearings as a potentially, dangerous act" (Deutermann, 2011, p. 235). Hamlet does not find solace anywhere, he rather expresses his anguish over certain stage sounds as well, "O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings" (Shakespeare, 1603, Hamlet, III. ii. 10-11). Nevertheless, Hamlet does not get affected because of tone deafness rather by his inability to differentiate between the benign and malign power of music or in a broader sense the power of sound. Deutermann (2011) proposes that "Noises can damage vulnerable hearers, but they can also be ignored, deflected, or selectively sampled by active listeners" (Deutermann, 2011, p. 236). Hamlet, however, fails to process sound and music. He fails at his attempts to self-actualization, instead pushes himself towards self-alienation – a characteristic new-individual paradigm.

Hamlet's attempt at individuation in search of the Self – a Jungian archetype – goes awry because of his inability to cast off the 'Persona'. He is introduced not as the Hamlet what he used to be or what he could be. The initial encounters of the audience with him are with his persona of a grief stricken, mournful Hamlet. Gertrude asks, "Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off, and let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark" (Shakespeare 1603 Hamlet I.ii.70-71). Hamlet, however, fails to cast "the knighted colour off". Later, when the ghost lays down the duty of revenge on him, Hamlet has nothing else to offer, but another "Persona". He decides to "put an antic disposition on" (I.v.192). Even afterwards he does not challenge Claudius directly; he opts to enact a play to "catch the conscience of the king" (II. ii. 634). Here he had also entered the "anima" while cursing himself that "a son of a dear father murdered.... Must like a whore, unpack my heart with words" (II. ii. 612-14). Hamlet is perhaps preoccupied with his biological mirror image, and his antic disposition also hints at a bipolar image of his Self.

The mouse trap, play within a play, is the only constructive effort emerging from the 'shadow'; however, that is aimed at a violent goal. Hamlet makes it clear after staging

the mouse trap, “Now could I drink hot blood, and do such bitter business as the day, would quake to look on” (III. ii. 422-425). The protagonist can draw destruction only from the ‘shadow’. Hamlet cannot find a harmonious note to grasp anything constructive to resolve the conflict. G. Wilson Knight in his essay *The Embassy of Death* observes that “his (Hamlet’s) mind is drawn to images in themselves repellent, and he dwells on the thought of foulness as the basis of life” (Knight, 24). The world is nothing, but an “un-weeded garden” and such rankness pervades Elsinore that both the protagonist and antagonist could feel themselves engulfed by it. Hamlet thinks that all that grows is “rank and gross in nature” (I. ii. 140), and Claudius is aware that his “offence is rank, it smells to heaven” (III. iii. 40). And all the rankness issues from the ear that is “Rankly abused” (I. v. 45). The Psychoacoustic deafness hinting at the idiomatic Van Gogh’s ear for music is the root of all the rankness that permeates the socio-political fabric of Elsinore.

Contrary to the music Savvy societies in Shakespearean comedies, Hamlet being a Shakespearean tragedy presents a music deaf society. Shakespearean comedies often present societies accustomed to the harmonies of music. These harmonies are used as a medium to represent the emotional depth and communal cohesion. For example, in *Twelfth Night*, Orsino’s opening line, “If music be the food of love, play on” (I. i.1), immediately establishes music as both a narrative and an emotional device that reflects characters’ feelings, thoughts and the cultural inclinations of a society. In the same way, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* utilizes music as an instrument of enchantment and unity, where fairies sing to bless the union of lovers (V. i. 404-412). Contrastingly, Hamlet portrays Elsinore as a society metaphorically deaf to music. This reflects its dissonance and existential despair. Claudius’s remark reflects this absence of harmony, “Give me some light. Away!” (III. ii. 252), a reaction that highlights his helplessness to confront the disharmony of his actions and the repercussions of those acts. The player’s performance might have introduced music as an artistic liberation, but the performance is utilized as a tool for exposure than harmony, to “catch the conscience of the king” than to find solutions. In such societies, unlike the melodious environments of Shakespearean comedies, the tragedy’s tendency is to emphasize discord and fragmentation over unity. In *Macbeth*, the play demonstrates its “wild and fearful” sounds during the witches’ appearances (IV. ii. 128); Shakespeare’s tragic worlds are often defined by their cacophony, reflecting the chaos within the psyche of characters and the fractured societies. Hence, Hamlet’s music deaf society represents the thematic concerns of

tragedy, in sharp contrast to the harmonious environment of Shakespearean comedies.

Hamlet is aware of the prevailing psychoacoustic deafness. After he instructs the players for enacting the mouse trap, he raises a question at the entrance of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern "How now my lord, will the King hear the piece of work" (III. ii. 48-49). Perhaps, this doubt forces him to include the dumb show at the beginning of the play, the mouse trap. However, both Hamlet and Claudius are not tone deaf, but they cannot differentiate the constructive power of music from its violence. They have like Van Gogh cut off their ear that could discern melody from a wailing chant. Both Hamlet's and Claudius soliloquies are no different from a "Nasheed" – a jihadist composition. Hayat Alvi (2020) while discussing the composition of Nasheed states that "groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda present Nasheed without music.... Instrumental music and female voices are not allowed" (Alvi, 2020, p. 43). In Elsinore, like an extremist and music repellent new individualist society, the female voices are unheard. The melodious notes of Ophelia are equated as madness leading to death. On the other hand, Nasheed like music-less soliloquies of Hamlet and Claudius propagate the heroic nature of the speaker grappling with external and internal challenges. Alvi states that "Nasheed.... often contain graphic, grotesque, and morbid imagery from battlefields" (p. 47). The soliloquies in Hamlet are also replete with such imagery, such as "the slings and arrows...or to take arms against a sea of troubles" (Shakespeare, 1603, Hamlet, III. i. 66-67). A Nasheed like propagandist motivation is found in the soliloquies as when Hamlet ponders after witnessing the vigorous Norwegian prince Fortinbras on his way to attack Poland, "O, from this time forth, my thoughts be bloody or nothing worth" (IV. v. 68-69).

Furthermore, Hamlet's crisis is aggravated by his failure to utilize the Jungian therapeutic powers of music. This near anxiety condition could have been averted if music had been lent an ear. Like any new individualist, music repellent society and state, Elsinore presents an inability to utilize the backdoor channels of diplomacy to avert tragedies. Claudius hires Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as his emissaries not to find a peaceful solution rather to kill Hamlet by sending a letter to the King of England. Hamlet refers to this inability of political emissaries to effectively utilize music while conversating with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, "do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you (can) fret me, you cannot play upon me" (III. ii. 400-402). Similarly, in a new individualist paradigm cultural diplomacy holds a central position to break the

impasse between conflicting states. Bangash and Hashmi (2018) in their analysis of Pakistan – India relations claim that “musicians from both India and Pakistan” have “created synergies” which are “deeply connecting the generation” (Bangash & Hashmi, 2018, p. 121). However, in *Elsinore*, the psychoacoustic deafness hinders any attempt at music diplomacy; hence, the tragedy is inevitable.

The reading of the tragedy of Prince Hamlet provokes a study of the psychoacoustic deafness of a society brought face to face with the aesthetic decadence of its taste in music. It invites a sensitive exploration of the psychoacoustic deafness that reflects a society’s loss of capacity to both perceive and appreciate harmony. This incapacity is not restricted to music only, but also extends to moral aesthetics. The sensory and cultural decline in *Hamlet* is symbolic of an ethical and existential decay. The absence of music in the play, especially in moments where Shakespeare in several plays utilizes musicality to create emotional depth and social unity, hints a deeper disconnection. For example, Hamlet’s dirge “What a piece of work is man... and yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?” (II. ii. 304–308), highlights his disappointment with the failure of humanity to echo higher ideals. This conflict extends to the court of *Elsinore*, where the kingdom’s moral corruption is reflected in the absence of harmonious expression. Claudius’s failed prayers. “My words fly up, my thoughts remain below: Words without thoughts never to heaven go” (III. iii. 97–98), is symbolic of the inability of sound and sentiment to combine as a meaningful harmony. These instances are suggestive of a psychoacoustic deafness—societal inability to associate aesthetic appreciation with ethical sensibility. This results in a cultural and a moral decay. *Hamlet* exposes a society separated from the redemptive potential of harmonious notes, echoing the broader theme of disillusionments and decay in tragedy.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

In *Elsinore*’s psychoacoustic music deaf society, Ophelia only could have “sucked the honey of his (Hamlet’s) musicked vows” (III. ii, 170). However, under the influence of the collective unconscious of *Elsinore*, Hamlet also cuts off his ear for music. Hence, Ophelia is left alone and bewildered as in an extremist new individual community where female voices and music remain unheard. Hamlet cannot differentiate between the constructive powers of music and the violence. *Elsinore*, in fact, like any new-individual society is too engrossed with self-alienation, and all attempts at individuation to actualize the self are flawed due to the prevailing

psychoacoustic deafness. The play as Hazlitt suggested has a “prophetic truth”. It serves as a prophesy for the tragedies of music repellent, new individual communities. Furthermore, the mysterious tragedy of Hamlet even appears as a prophesy for the mystery of Van Gogh’s act of cutting off his ear.

In an age of new-individualism, societies suffer from the psychoacoustic deafness to music. The conflicts and the crisis emerging from a self-centered world view could be averted by utilizing the harmonious powers of music. Furthermore, this essay might elicit further inquiry, as along with Jungian Psychoanalysis and New Individualism, this aspect of the play can be observed through the lens of Feminism, Marxism, Musicology, and Security Studies.

## References

- Alons, M. C. (2018). *Hamlet as music: A study in the semantics of symphonic poetry*. Southeastern University - Lakeland.
- Bangash, et. al. (2018). Cultural Diplomacy and Pakistan-India Relations. *Journal of Indian Studies*, vol. 4. No. 1, 2018, P. 121.
- Bertoldi, Andreas. (2004). Shakespeare, psychoanalysis and coloniality. *Post-Colonial Shakespeare*. Edited by Loomba, Orkin. Routledge. P. 238.
- Deutermann, Allison K. (2011). "Caviare to the General"? Taste, Hearing, and Genre in Hamlet." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 62, no. 2, pp. 230-255. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/23025629](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23025629). Accessed 20 Jan. 2021
- Doubleday, Veronica. (2007). *9/11 and the Politics of Music Making in Afghanistan*. Posgrado UNAM. P.280.
- Elliot, Anthony. (2013). *The theory of New Individualism*. Cambridge University Press. P.190.
- Fike, Matthew. (2011). *Shadow and Anima in Hamlet: Mermaid Allusion and the Stages of Eroticism. A Jungian Study of Shakespeare*. P. 112.
- Gilman L. Sander. (2018). *Music and Psychoanalysis*. The Oxford Handbook of Music and the Body. Oxford University Press. Pp. 2,11
- Goodson T, Ellen. (2010) *Of Ladies Most Deject and Wretched: Diagnosing Shakespeare's Ophelia with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*. *Inquiries Journal*. Vol 2 No.7. P.1.
- Hazlitt, William. (1869) *The Round Table: A collection of Essays on Literature, Men and Manners*. Archibald Constable. (London: Sampson, Low, son and Marston.). P. 1
- Johnson, B. (2018). *Hamlet: Voice, music, sound*. In W. A. Owens & L. C. Wood (Eds.), *Shakespeare and the acoustic* (pp. 111-127). Cambridge University Press. Jones, Earnest. *Hamlet and Oedipus*. Norton. New York, 1949. P. 17, 127
- Jung G, Carl. (1929). *Collected Works vol. 8 (ed. 1960), The Significance of Constitution and Heredity in Psychology*. (229-30) P. 112
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1959). *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (London ed.1996) P. 43.
- Knight G, Wilson. (1935) "The Embassy of Death: An Essay on Hamlet". *The Wheel of Fire*. Routledge. London. Paperback 2001. P.24
- Kroeker, Joel. (2019). *Jungian music psychotherapy: When psyche sings*. London: Routledge. P. 8, 10, 29
- Leonard, Kendra Preston. (2009). *Shakespeare, madness, and music: scoring insanity in cinematic adaptations*, The Scarecrow Press, Inc. Lanham, Toronto Plymouth, UK. P.73.
- Marlowe, Christopher. (1592). *Doctor Faustus*. Ed. 2005 Routledge, London, and New York.
- Nagari, Benjamin. (2013). *Music as Image: An Analytical Psychology Approach to Music Film*. University of Westminster. P. 13
- Sach, Wulf. (1937). *Black Hamlet: The mind of an African Negro Revealed by Psychoanalysis*. P. 177.
- Smith D, Rachel. (2017). *Jung and the Transcendent Function in Music Therapy*. pp.1, 18
- Shakespeare, William. (1600). *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In S. Wells & G. Taylor (Eds.), *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*. Oxford University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1603). *Hamlet*. ed. 2012. Simon & Schuster.UK.

\_\_\_\_\_. (1612). *Tempest*. Ed. 2015. Simon & Schuster. UK.

\_\_\_\_\_. (1602). *Twelfth Night*. Ed. 2015. Penguin Classics. Penguin Books UK.

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. (2022, October 4). Music and madness in Shakespeare's plays.

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Blogs. <https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/blogs/music-and-madness-shakespeares-plays/>

Skar, Patricia. (2002). The goal as process: music and the search for the Self. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, P. 632, 635.

Sternfeld, F. W. (1963). *Music in Shakespearean Tragedy*. Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Tung, Chung. (2007). The Strange Eruption in Hamlet: Shakespeare's Psychoanalytic Vision. P. 20

Weitz, Morris. (1965). Preface. *Hamlet and the Philosophy of Literary Criticism*. Faber. P. X.

Article Information:

<i>Received</i>	11-Sept-2024
<i>Revised</i>	30-Nov-2024
<i>Accepted</i>	10-Dec-2024
<i>Published</i>	15-Dec-2024

---

Declarations:

Authors' Contribution:

- All authors **Conceptualization, and intellectual revisions. Data collection, interpretation, and drafting of manuscript**
- The authors agree to take responsibility for every facet of the work, making sure that any concerns about its integrity or veracity are thoroughly examined and addressed

• **Conflict of Interest:** NIL

• **Funding Sources:** NIL

Correspondence:

Ali Inan

inan.ali.gamaryan@gmail.com

---