

Samantha Healy

Greek Portrayals of Madness

Whalen Symposium Submission

ICSM- The Golden City

### **Abstract**

This essay argues that Greek tragedies display the phenomenon of madness in a process of four stages. The first stage is angering the gods, in which case the character, or a member of their family, has done something that upset or angered the god to an extreme extent. The second stage is the infliction of the madness into the character, where the character has some divine experience where the god or goddess puts the madness into them. The third stage is hallucinations and out of body experiences, these are often very violent and end with the death of family and friends. The last stage is the removal of the madness where the god or goddess takes away the characters madness and leaves them to discover what they have done, leaving them in a state of complete depression and horror. There is a regular pattern for the appearance of madness looking at these four Greek tragedies – Herakles, Hippolytus, The Bacchae, and Ajax. Each step in the process emphasizes the divine exterior of madness on humans and shows that the punishment is by action of the gods. Madness is not a psychological state of being, but divine intervention from the gods.