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Literature, William Shakespeare



Singh | 5 Maheep Singh Ms. Campbell ENG4U 01/10/12 Mental deterioration in Hamlet William Shakespeare's play Hamlet explores the thought process of a man on a mission for revenge and the psychological factors associated with it. By making Hamlet an over-contemplating protagonist Shakespeare is successfully able to explore the thought process of someone out to get revenge. A major theme in the play Hamlet is mental deterioration. Hamlet's antics blur the line between acting and real madness, Ophelia loses her ability to rationalize after losing Hamlet then her father, Laertes loses self control and resolve after learning of his father's murder and sister's suicide. To start with, Hamlet's antics start out as a ruse to find out more about the murder and confirm that Claudius was the real killer, but as time goes on there are delays as to acquiring the information due to Hamlet's indecisiveness. By over-thinking Hamlet loses control over reality and his purpose, also he drifts off in thought which clouds his mind of reason. He acts disarranged when Polonius comes to question him, giving him odd answers laced with minute observations about him. Later on his antics just become self destructive when he denounces Ophelia. His ruse during the play is too convincing, but the real proof of his madness is his rash murder of Polonius, when he says " How now, a rat? Dead for a ducat, dead! " (3, 4, 25) this can be interpreted in a variety of ways but a closer look at the lines that follow reveal he has lost his rationale. Later on when his mother Gertrude says " Oh, what a rash and bloody deed is this! " (3, 4, 29) this quote shows that it is against Hamlet's nature to act without knowing all the facts. This act clearly shows signs of mental deterioration due to his extravagant ruse of madness. The contributing factors to his mental deterioration and antic ruse

are, the loss of his father, his depression, the supernatural-ghost of his father sending him a mission, and his indecisive personality. Secondly, Hamlet is not the only one privy to the loss of a loved one. Ophelia loses first Hamlet due to her father's wishes, and then her father to Hamlet's insane disposition. Ophelia is represented as a young woman bound to be doomed. At the beginning of the Laertes simply advises her to make sure Hamlet really loves her. Fear it, Ophelia. Fear it, my dear sister, And keep you in the rear of your affection, Out of the shot and danger of desire. The chariest maid is prodigal enough If she unmask her beauty to the moon. Virtue itself 'scapes not calumnious strokes. The canker galls the infants of the spring Too oft before their buttons be disclosed. And in the morn and liquid dew of youth, Contagious blastments are most imminent. Be wary, then. Best safety lies in fear. Youth to itself rebels, though none else near. (1, 3, 12-44) These lines said by Laertes to Ophelia show that Laertes understands her and Hamlet's point of view and tells Ophelia to take a variety of variables into consideration before committing herself to Hamlet. He tells her that in her position she has no control over their relationship, and that Hamlet has the ability to fool around and do as he wishes because of his stature. But Polonius her father, orders her outright to stay away from Hamlet. Believe so much in him that he is young, And with a larger tether may he walk Than may be given you. In few, Ophelia, Do not believe his vows, for they are brokers Not of that dye which their investments show, But mere implorators of unholy suits, Breathing like sanctified and pious bawds, The better to beguile. This is for all: I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth, Have you so slander any moment leisure, As to give words or talk with the Lord

Hamlet. (1, 3, 124-134) This causes Hamlet who is already dealing with more than an average person can, to reject/avoid her due to his mental deterioration and inability to comprehend. Not only that, she is set up for another rejection by her father and Claudius. Hamlet at this point loses control, and this time outright rejects Ophelia. Not only losing the one she loves but losing her father at the hands of the one she loved sent her over the edge. After hamlet kills Polonius Ophelia loses her composure, her mental state deteriorates she cannot comprehend the loss of two loved ones in short succession and loses the ability to think as any "normal" person would. The last character being analyzed for mental deterioration is Laertes. Laertes loses his composure and resolve after learning of his father's death. Laertes "secretly" sails back to Denmark from France. Laertes already a man of action loses control and would have killed Claudius had it not been for Claudius' smooth talk. And so have I a noble father lost, A sister driven into desperate terms, Whose worth, if praises may go back again, Stood challenger on mount of all the age For her perfections. But my revenge will come. (4, 5, 124-126) The rage in Laertes causes his mental deterioration. He is easily swayed to Claudius' methods. He goes against his conscience "And yet it is almost 'gainst my conscience. " (5, 2, 292) and duels Hamlet unfairly using a sharp sword and poisoning it. Laertes' mental deterioration is further increased by the loss of his sister. Whose loss Claudius suggests was Hamlet's fault. Both Ophelia and Laertes lose two loved ones in the play. In conclusion, mental deterioration is a major theme in the play Hamlet. Hamlet's acting deteriorates his mind and makes him indecisive. Ophelia's loss of her father and Hamlet deteriorates her state of mind causing her to

commit suicide. Laertes' mental deterioration is due to the fact that his father was murdered and his sister committed suicide. Hamlet which a majority of people believe to be a story of revenge has an undertone of a variety of themes which upon closer inspection turn out to be one of the leading cause for the tragedy. Bibliography Barnet, Sylvan, and William Shakespeare. *The Tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark*. New York: Penguin Group &, 1998. Print.