

Hamlets antic disposition real or unreal literature review examples

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Hamlet's Antic Disposition: Real or Unreal

The young prince Hamlet decided to put on an "antic disposition" to find out if the supposed ghost of his father had been telling the truth about its death. But as the play progresses, there are moments when Hamlet's insanity seems to become less and less of a pretense and seems to become more and more genuine. Most of his actions and thoughts are consistent of that of an insane person; however, some of his actions and thoughts also indicate that he is aware of this and that it is all part of his act.

Insanity is a very broad terminology used for many mental illnesses. But for the purposes of this paper, I would like to define insanity as a condition wherein the person is mentally incapable of making sound decisions. This means that the person with this condition cannot be held liable for his or her decisions, words, and actions, whether these have a positive or negative impact on the person or even other people or society at large. I would like to consider insanity as a mental incapacity that prevents the sufferer from making sound and informed choices.

In the case of Hamlet, it would be prudent to look at both sides - whether his lunacy is real or not - to determine which might be true. Hamlet's actions indicated either one or the other and looking at these actions closely may reveal which is true.

Let us first look at the possibility that Hamlet's insanity was not an act. Prior to his decision to pretend to be insane, Hamlet was already noticeably having bouts of depression. He was constantly withdrawn, resentful of both

his mother and Claudius, and was already thinking about suicide. This depression was brought about by the death of his father who he clearly reveres and the quick marriage of his mother to his uncle. Hamlet's thoughts are mostly dark and somber and he makes extremely dark conclusions such as suicide could be the best course of action since his mother's marriage indicates that his mother is a selfish person and if she is, then the whole world is.

Hamlet's outbursts also show a possibility of real insanity. His thoughts on death and life are becoming more and more dark and serious. His outburst during Ophelia's funeral was hugely different from his outburst the last time he talked with Ophelia; during the funeral he insisted that he loved Ophelia more than anyone did when all he did when he last talked to Ophelia was rage at her.

On the other side of the coin, there is also a possibility that Hamlet was feigning insanity. There are certain evidences that support this idea. The first and most glaring of which is that Hamlet openly declares that he will be putting on an antic disposition. Before he started to pretend that he is insane, Hamlet told his friend Horatio of his plan.

There were also many instances when Hamlet declared to the audience in his thinking -out-loud moments that he must start pretending to be foolish just before anyone enters the scene and sees him. And true enough, he starts talking about foolish things whenever anyone, especially his mother, Claudius, and his henchmen, enters the scene.

Another evidence of this is that when Hamlet confronted Gertrude, his

mother. While Gertrude thought that his ranting and raving and his accusations of Claudius is proof of his madness, Hamlet told her that he was just indeed pretending to be insane.

Hamlet's supposed insanity is played in a way that you would doubt whether it is real or not. Take for instance Claudius and Polonius. While Claudius and Polonius think that Hamlet is insane, they were not sure and they deemed it necessary to find out the reasons behind his actions and perceived madness.

Polonius, though pretty much convinced that Hamlet is insane for love of his daughter Ophelia, admitted after talking to Hamlet that if Hamlet is indeed insane, there is a method to it. Even Hamlet's friends are not sure; they keep asking questions which Hamlet keeps dodging.

Another thing to look at is the differences between Hamlet's madness to Ophelia. Ophelia had had indeed gone mad. Ophelia spent her remaining days after her father's death wandering around, singing, raving, and ranting. While Hamlet, no matter how much he raves, does not disclose the cause of his madness, Ophelia is rather transparent; her actions and words reveal, directly or indirectly, the reasons for her insanity. She also did not mention that she had a purpose for acting the way she is acting, unlike Hamlet who declared to Horatio the reason behind his act.

Also, unlike Ophelia who was oblivious to what is happening around her to the point of being unable to recognize her brother, Hamlet is aware of almost everything that happens. He observes people, gauges situations, and was

quick-witted enough to find out about Claudius' plan to have him killed and escape it.

Based on the definition of insanity as stated above, it can be said that Hamlet's insanity is just a calculated plan that he put his motion to achieve his goals. Hamlet is not mentally incapable to make decision. He was even able to toy and goad Polonius by never with seemingly unrelated answers to questions that are in actuality full of meaning and innuendo.

But perhaps the biggest instance that proves Hamlet is not insane is when he heard Claudius confess in prayer that he did kill Hamlet's father. Hamlet refrained from killing him because he thought that to kill him while he is in prayer is a sure way of sending Claudius' soul to heaven. He reasoned that he wanted Claudius soul to go directly to hell given the fact that his father, who in Hamlet's eyes is a better man, is suffering in purgatory. He decided to wait for when Claudius is doing something that would merit him hell before killing him. A truly insane person cannot reason the way that Hamlet did at that moment.

While not as insane as Ophelia, Hamlet is not exactly what you'd call emotionally stable. Just by looking through his actions and thoughts, it is quite possible that yes, Hamlet may be suffering from emotional instability as indicated by his depression and occasional ravings. However, Hamlet is mentally capable and is therefore, based on the definition of insanity, not insane.