

# Hamlet the mad prince was he insane book review examples

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



For centuries, scholars have been trying to figure out if Hamlet was insane, sane but acting insane, or sane at times and insane at others. Einstein held the opinion that insanity is a sane reaction to an insane world and Hamlet definitely lived in an insane world. His uncle killed his father so he could seize the throne, then he married Hamlet's mother Queen Gertrude. Then Ophelia kills herself. This behavior is not part of mundane day to day life, not even in a royal family or on reality TV. It is enough to drive a man insane. However, acting insane is also an opportunity for Hamlet to plot revenge without being scrutinized. Intelligence has nothing to do with insanity and he is definitely intelligent enough to figure that out. That makes a strong case in favor of him being acting insane. There is a third possible conjecture; Hamlet's apparent insanity is what we would now commonly call "temporary insanity." Unable for a time to distinguish right from wrong in that circumstance, but otherwise very sane. He is mad, but in the sense of being angry, a sane reaction to an insane world. This is why I believe the Mad Prince Hamlet is sane, but his anger, madness so to speak, drives him to insane acts in the end.

First, it is important to define insanity. The United States Courts use the M'Naghten rule (as a result of mental disease, were defendants able to know the nature and quality of their conduct or, if they did know it, did they know it was wrong?) . By that definition, Hamlet was insane in that he did not think it was wrong to exact his own justice on the people who had killed his father and driven his fiancée to take her life. Law also provides for a defense of temporary insanity or diminished capacity, which allows that a person might be "briefly insane at the time the crime was committed and therefore was

incapable of knowing the nature of his criminal act.” Mosby’s Medical Dictionary defines insanity as:

“ A term used more in legal and social than in medical terminology. It refers to those mental illnesses that are of such a serious or debilitating nature as to interfere with one's capability of functioning within the legal limits of society and performing the normal activities of daily living.” .

Segen’s Medical Dictionary sees insanity as:

A legal and social term for a condition that renders the affected person unfit to enjoy liberty of action, because of the unreliability of his behavior with concomitant danger to himself and others; insanity denotes, by extension, a degree of mental illness that negates legal responsibility for one’s actions.

The doctors who support the theory of insanity throughout see rationality laced with insanity throughout the play. Now some people may say that anyone who sees ghosts cannot be considered sane. However, it is not Hamlet who first encounters the ghost; it is two watchmen, who see him first. The next person to see the ghost is Horatio, a scholar and a reliable witness. Hamlet is brought to the spot by the reports from these people and is the fourth person in the play to see the ghost. Therefore, it can be assumed that, in the context of this play seeing ghosts is not unreasonable. However, the case for insanity does not rely on Hamlet’s ghost hunting activities; it is based on the prince’s behavior throughout the play.

Look at Hamlet's treatment of the elderly courtier Polonius who is father to Ophelia and Laertes; the abuse he heaps upon him and the way he does it is typical of the insane. Hamlet is "melancholy" and acts erratically after his father's ghost tells him his story, so much so that Claudius and Gertrude set his friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to watch him. Polonius suggests Hamlet is madly in love with his daughter Ophelia. This and the arrival of the theater troop is all set in motion in the second act, so the idea that Hamlet may be truly insane from the start is a constant throughout the play. His mood swings and bad dreams might earn him a diagnosis of bi-polar today. This condition is not generally considered "insane" just debilitating and treatable. Certainly many people are depressed after a parent dies. Nevertheless, with the added pressure of his father's murder and the ghostly conversations it could be enough to push him over the edge. Certainly, it raises doubts about his sanity from the start.

Of course, no perfectly sane person contemplates suicide, even if it is done as eloquently in the famous "To Be, or Not To Be" speech. However, when Claudius and Polonius spy on the two, Hamlet seems more mad than in love. He orders Ophelia to enter a nunnery and says he wants to ban marriage. Then he storms off leaving Ophelia to believe he is out of his "noble mind." Like any doting father, Polonius still believes Hamlet is in love with his daughter. Claudius is convinced that there is something else. They both agree that sending him to England is a good idea. But first arranges for Polonius to hide and watch an encounter with Hamlet and his mother, Queen

Gertrude later the evening entertainment. This is the play Hamlet has planned.

Before the play starts Hamlet meets with Horatio relates his conversations with the ghost and tells his plan to trap Claudius by the content of the play. At that point, he seems quite sane, and it does explain his behavior later on, which is quite to the reverse. After Claudius storms out Hamlet is angry and upset, but resolved to remain in control of himself when he confronts his mother. Certainly, this is not insane behavior under the circumstances. He may have seemed paranoid when he accused Rosencrantz and Guildenstern of spying on him, but then that is exactly what the king and queen asked them to do.

Thinking people are spying on you when they are not is crazy, realizing when people are spying on you is not. When he is alone afterwards he seemed fine, but when Ophelia came in it is a different story. He is torn; he loves her, thinks she is there to find out just how crazy he is and suspected someone else may be watching as well. He was right in that as well, not crazy at all just acting that way.

When he sees his mother after the play, he confronts her. She is afraid for her life and call for help, so does Polonius echoes her screams from behind the curtain Hamlet stabs him thinking he is the king and does not find out whom he really is until after he is dead. Then Hamlet swears her to secrecy at this point the only two people he can act sane with are she and Horatio, and then only when he is sure they are not being watched. Therefore, any

subsequent insane behavior can be put down to Hamlet's acting skills. The scenes that follow from the journey to England, the sword fight with Laertes and his death might show he is insane, or it may just be he is acting. To see his mother drink the poisoned cup intended for him and killing the man responsible could certainly be the act of a man who was not able at the time to know the nature and quality of his conduct or, if knowing it, did not know it was wrong. This is why I believe that Hamlet, while justifiably "mad" at the end of the play was not truly insane.

### **References:**

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