

Analysis of the expression of madness in shakespeare's hamlet

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Madness can be defined as a severely disordered state of the mind usually caused by a mental disorder. Madness can arise in people who endure traumatic experiences and stress and cannot find a way to control their behaviour. In Shakespeare's Hamlet, whether or not Hamlet is truly mad is controversial. Hamlet is in an extremely fragile mental state after the death of his father and the recent marriage of his mother and Claudius. Hamlet's confrontation with the ghost triggers his feelings of vengeance and he becomes obsessed with revenge. Hamlet claims his madness is an act at first, but he allows himself to be consumed by his desire for retribution until he descends into a state of true madness. Hamlet's struggle with his mental illness causes him to truly become insane which is shown through his interactions with Ophelia and Gertrude, and his thoughts.

Hamlet's treatment towards Ophelia is an expression of his anger and madness, provoked by his feelings of revenge. Ophelia tells Polonius about her romantic relationship with Hamlet, saying that " he hath, my lord, of late, made many tenders of his affection to me". Hamlet is still seeing Ophelia after his father's death, determining he sees her as a source of happiness. He has feelings of affection towards Ophelia, but Polonius instructs Ophelia to stop seeing him. Paired with his father's death, Hamlet does not have anyone else to support him in his difficult time, resulting in his poor mental health. Hamlet shows signs of madness when he speaks to Ophelia while Polonius and Claudius are spying on him. He expresses misogynistic behaviour by telling Ophelia " if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them". Hamlet is angry at women because he feels rejected by Ophelia and his mother for marrying

so soon after his father's death. Although Hamlet insists he is acting, he makes these comments sincerely and passionately because he is expressing his deepest thoughts and feelings. He decides that all women are bad because of his desire for revenge towards Gertrude and Ophelia, revealing his delusion. Hamlet does not know that Polonius and Claudius are listening to their conversation, therefore his offensive outburst reveals an indication of his inner madness as it does not benefit him or his plan for revenge.

Additionally, Hamlet lies about his feelings for Ophelia. Hamlet tells Ophelia that he "did love you once", but claims that he does not anymore. However, at Ophelia's funeral, he becomes hostile and declares to everyone that he "loved Ophelia; forty thousand brothers could not, with all their quantity of love, make up my sum". Hamlet's anger and confusion display his madness and show that he is not able to make rational decisions. Hamlet acts out against Ophelia as a result of her rejection and denounces all women, showing his insanity.

Hamlet exhibits his madness to Gertrude when he confronts her about her marriage to Claudius. When Hamlet discovers that he kills Polonius, he says "This wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!". Hamlet shows no remorse after killing a person and even insults him afterwards. Hamlet's plan to fake his madness is to get revenge on Claudius but killing an innocent person without a second thought determines that he has truly become mad. Hamlet does not understand the seriousness of the crime he commits and he cannot control his impulsive behaviour, which is a sign that he is suffering from insanity. Furthermore, Hamlet sees his father's ghost while he interrogates

his mother. " Save me, and hover o'er me with your wings, you heavenly guards! What would you, gracious figure?". Hamlet treats the ghost as if it were an angel. Hamlet still suffers from his father's death and as a result, is having hallucinations of him. He praises it and asks it for advice, showing his reliance on the ghost when making decisions. Gertrude is unable to see or hear the ghost because it is all in Hamlet's imagination. This is a common symptom of mental illness and reveals that Hamlet is not feigning his madness. Gertrude realizes that her son has gone truly mad after he murders Polonius and his imaginary encounter with the ghost.

Hamlet expresses his inner thoughts and feelings through soliloquies throughout the play that signify his madness and mental illness. He regularly talks about death and questions his extinction: " To be or not to be? That is the question - Whether ' tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and, by opposing, end them?". Hamlet is playing with the idea of suicide, which is unhealthy and an indicator of depression. The cause of his suicidal thoughts comes from his loneliness after a lack of sympathy from his mother and Ophelia. Hamlet confesses his feelings of melancholy and sadness, which results in him becoming mentally unstable. In addition to his obsession with death, Hamlet's inability to act on his desire for revenge drives him deeper into madness. When Hamlet first finds out about his father's murder, he is determined to get revenge on Claudius immediately: " Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift as meditation or the thoughts of love may sweep to my revenge" Hamlet finds multiple opportunities to exact his revenge on

Claudius but is unable to act. Hamlet criticizes himself, wondering “ whether it be bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple, or thinking too precisely in the event” that is stopping him from killing Claudius. He calls himself a coward, and decides that his thoughts “ be bloody, or be nothing worth!”. He does not think about the repercussions of his actions, displaying his recklessness and his indifferent attitude towards his own life.

Fuelled by his desire for revenge, Hamlet’s plan to feign madness ultimately results in him becoming truly insane. He becomes malicious and hateful when Ophelia rejects him, and he lies to her about his feelings for her. Hamlet has no remorse after killing Polonius in front of Gertrude and hallucinates the ghost, allowing it to control his actions and treating it like an angel. His thoughts of mortality reveal his depression and his inability to kill Claudius drives him into madness. Although Hamlet eventually achieves his purpose, his plan not only results in his death but also other innocent people, whether it was direct or indirect.