

Hamlet guildenstern,  
to the house to find



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Hamlet and Lear Essay Shakespeare has many overlapping themes that seem to correlate throughout his different works of literature. However, there are many themes that conflict as well. King Lear and Hamlet are two works of literature that can be both compared and contrasted. Hamlet and Lear seem to be complete opposites on the surface. Hamlet is a young prince who is lost in a world of confusion and deception. His father is brutally murdered by his uncle and he then must face him as his new father-in-law when he marries his mother.

Lear is an elderly man who is past his prime and is trying to raise his daughters in a world of vanity and live with the Renaissance's preoccupation with appearances. As conflicting as these two characters seem they also have to deal with many of the same pressures and they surprisingly handle certain situations similarly. One such circumstance is that they are both forced to the verge of madness. But this isn't the only thing that is coincidental between the two characters' situation.

They both have methods to their madness. Hamlet goes through many trials and tribulations throughout this play. He must live through his father's untimely death, his uncle's hasty marriage to his mother, Ophelia's refusal to see him or except his love letters, and the conspiracies that he sees planned against him. This alone is enough for any reader to understand why he has gone mad and to sympathize with. But Hamlet is stronger than he lets on to anybody.

He is only pretending to be as mad as he is so that people will not become suspicious when he snoops around the house and acts irrationally toward his

mother and step-father. His madness becomes the obsession of the house and King Claudius actually brings his old friends, Rosencranz and Guildenstern, to the house to find out what is causing him to lose his sanity. He asks them, "Something have you heard of Hamlet's transformation?" Everybody ends up with his or her own personal explanation to why Hamlet has gone mad. Queen Gertrude feels that it is simply his father's death and her marriage that has caused him to cross the line between sanity and insanity. Polonius believes that it was his refusal to let Hamlet see his daughter, Ophelia, that has made him mad. Ophelia can not find a reason for his madness, and feels it is the pressure of society and his new family that has changed him so dramatically. Whatever the reason, most of Hamlet's friends and family were set on the fact that Hamlet was no longer in his right mind. However, Hamlet used this tactic of pretending to be out of his wits to fool his enemies into underestimating his plans of revenge until the moment of attack, and then, of course, it would be too late.

King Lear also was accused of going mad. He divided his kingdom into three parts so that each one of his daughters could share in his wealth. He had each daughter battle against each other to see who could flatter him the most. Goneril and Regan both fought ruthlessly to attain the better division of land.

When his youngest daughter (who was also his favorite) told him that she loved him like a daughter should love a father and that one day she would have a husband that she would also love, he became frenetic. He disowned her from the family, leaving the property to his other two daughters. Lear is shunned by his two daughters later on in the play, and is kicked out onto the

streets where he becomes delirious. Although this display of daft behavior is more genuine than Hamlets, I believe that Lear ranted and raved because he was used to getting attention.

Social status was very crucial in the renaissance era. Many people would judge a person by how many followers and possessions they held. Now that Lear was on his own and not surrounded by his followers he felt that he was worth nothing if he had nothing.

For the first time in his life, he had to face his true self worth. I think this frightened