
HAMLET'S MADNESS

WAS HE MAD?

The YES, HE WAS MAD side:

- Hamlet appears to act mad when he hears of his father's murder. At the time he speaks "wild and whirling words" that appear senseless to Horatio and Marcellus [Act I, Scene v, lines 127-134].
- Hamlet's behavior throughout the play, especially towards Ophelia, is very erratic. He tells her that he never loved her when she returns his letters and gifts, but then professes to be the only one who ever truly loved her during the fight with Laertes at her grave.
- His mood changes abruptly throughout the play.
- He alone sees his father's ghost in his mother's chamber. Every other time the ghost appears someone else sees it. During this scene his mother does not see the ghost causing one to question whether it is actually there [Act III, scene iv, ~ line 105].
- He has violent outbursts towards his mother.
- He kills Polonius and will not tell anyone where the body is.
- He does not seem troubled by his murder of Polonius, even though Polonius is his girlfriend's father.
- He recklessly jumps aboard a pirate ship without anyone to back him up.
- He jumps into Ophelia's grave, and fights with Laertes in her grave.
- He has Rosencrantz and Guildenstern killed, even though they were not part of his *revenge-against-his-father's-murder* plan.
- Hamlet tells Laertes that he killed Polonius in a "fit of madness" and should not be held responsible for his actions [Act V, Scene ii, lines 236-250].

The *NO, HE WAS SANE* side:

- Hamlet tells Horatio that he is going to “feign madness,” and that if Horatio notices any strange behavior from Hamlet, it is because he is putting on an act [Act i, Scene v, lines 166-180].
- Hamlet's “madness” only manifests itself when he is in the presence of certain characters. When Hamlet is around Polonius, Claudius, Gertrude, Ophelia, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he behaves irrationally. When Hamlet is around Horatio, Bernardo, Francisco, The Players and the Gravediggers, he behaves rationally.
- Polonius admits that Hamlet's actions and words have a “method” to them; there appears to be a reason behind them, they are logical in nature [Act II, Scene ii, lines 206-207].
- Claudius confesses that Hamlet's “actions although strange, do not appear to stem from madness” [Act III, Scene i, lines 165-167].
- Hamlet's words and actions contrast deeply with Ophelia's obviously *true* madness.
- Hamlet tells his mother that he is not mad, “but mad in craft” [Act III, Scene iv, lines 188-199].
- Hamlet believes in his sanity at all times. He never doubts his control over psyche.

