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English 11 B

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### Mad North-North West: Insanity in *Hamlet*

If you've been paying any attention to the media lately, you've realized that Charlie Sheen has gone completely insane. His descent has been so impressive and widely publicized that one can't help but watch in horror as if witnessing a car crash. Insanity, or madness, is such an interesting thing that people wait with baited breath to find out what will happen next. This theme of madness is exactly what makes Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* so fascinating. Shakespeare uses madness, not only to keep the audience's attention, but to reveal much about its effects on people.

Insanity can come from other sources as well, such as love. In Act 2 scene 1 of *Hamlet*, Ophelia explains to her father, Polonius, that Hamlet has just approached her acting mad. Ophelia tells Polonius, "He took me by the wrist and held me hard; Then goes he to the length of all his arm, And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow, He falls to such perusal of my face As he would draw it. Long stay'd he so" (43.99). When Hamlet grabs her arm and simply stares at her deeply, Ophelia knows something is wrong with him. Polonius suggests that Hamlet has gone mad because of his love for Ophelia. Shakespeare seems to be suggesting that love is such a powerful force, it can drive someone crazy.

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In conclusion, Shakespeare reveals a lot about madness. He shows us that oftentimes madness can be brought on by intense tragedy. Also, madness can be used to avoid responsibility. Not only that, but Shakespeare clearly wants us to realize that madness can lead to its own tragedy. The world is filled with tragedy that can bring people to the brink of insanity. We must learn to help each other cope with such tremendous difficulties. If Hamlet had found someone to help him shoulder the weight of his knowledge, perhaps the play would have ended in a more uplifting manner.