

Is Hamlet actually mad or is he putting on an antic disposition?

Throughout 'Hamlet', the character of Hamlet is portrayed by Shakespeare as being mad. The question has often been raised by scholars, questioning whether Hamlet is actually mad or if he is just putting on an antic-disposition.

Following the death of his father, Hamlet mourns very deeply, which is expected of someone whose Dad had recently passed away, but is his mourning too 'over the top'? The concept of Hamlet's mourning, in which he expresses his deepest thoughts and emotions, especially in his first soliloquy, in which he says 'How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable' the world seems to him which provokes the reader to have feelings towards the character. This language hints at how depressed Hamlet is feeling and possibly that he is slightly insane? One may infer from this that Hamlet is feigning madness and putting on an antic disposition. This idea, is perceivable throughout the play, as he on many occasions states that he is pretending to be an insane madman. When Hamlet then says 'How strange or odd soe'er I bear myself, as I perchance hereafter shall think meet to put an antic disposition on', he tells his friends that he is going to act as if he has gone mad. This antic-disposition that he supposedly puts on seems so convincing that we often wonder if he is actually putting this madness on, or if he is actually plain mad. The word 'Antic' actually means something grotesque or bizarre which further sparks the thought of Hamlet becoming something very obtuse in comparison of what he would have been like before the death of his father.

If we take Sigmund Freud's readings and analyses to be true, we can understand that Hamlet is likely to be encountering himself in an unfeigned madness which has been caused by the stresses and perils of his childhood, including the death of his father. Freud's theory unveils that what Hamlet went through when he was a child directly impacts him as he is as an adult. As Freud was around long after the time of Shakespeare, 'Hamlet' is definitely not influenced by Freud, which shows how Shakespeare may have believed that in an attempt to make Claudius feel bad about his actions, putting on an antic disposition led to Hamlet to become mad, as a result of the death of his father, and the emotional roller coaster he was on during that time.

He claims that this disposition is put on, maybe in an attempt to make Claudius feel guilty and evoke emotions inside him which will make him possibly admit to what he did, which did happen eventually. This apparently staged madness I think may have changed during the play from being an antic disposition, into actual madness. This is viable, if we take into account Sigmund Freud's findings which claim that unpleasant things from childhood are stored up in the unconscious mind, which effect are every day life, conjuring up anger and negative emotions. The death of his father would have been deposited in both his conscious and unconscious mind. Once he started pretending to be mad, he focused more on being mad than the death of his father, so the death stays mainly in the unconscious. This conjured up large Mounds of rage in him which came out in the form of madness. This shows how the idea of his staged madness developing into madness is very plausible if we consider the Freudian analysis.

In conclusion, I believe that originally, Hamlet was putting on an antic disposition in a desperate attempt to lead Claudius to admit to, and feel extremely guilty about what he did concerning Hamlet's father. However, this disposition, without Hamlet noticing, changes into unfeigned madness, caused by the locking away of the emotions related with his father passing away. Furthermore, this is made plausible by Freud who states how childhood can impact later life.