

Michael Calvey

**Is Hamlet really mad or is he just putting on an antic disposition? How does Shakespeare use language to convey this?**

The whole of Shakespeare's Hamlet is centered around the idea of madness and mental instability. Hamlet is obviously hugely affected by the loss of his father and swift marriage of his mother. He goes through what seems like increased depression and madness as the play goes on.

The first clue we get that suggests this is when in Hamlet's first soliloquy Hamlet calls the world "Stale, weary and unprofitable" This suggests that he is beginning to lose his sense of reality and hence go crazy. The use of the word unprofitable conveys a feeling of how Hamlet believes that he can not gain anything by staying alive. This alludes to a notion of suicide which is later explored in more detail by Hamlet.

Shakespeare's use of repetition in " O god, O god" adds to the portrayal of Hamlet as enraged at the whole world; even at god. This is a very strong line since god religion was pretty much the center of medieval life, and Hamlet calls upon god saying how horrible he feels the world is.

One of the main clues we get about Hamlet being crazy is the third appearance of the ghost in act 3 scene 4. Hamlet sees a ghost which his mother can not, suggesting that it is all a figment of his imagination. With this in mind, we are brought back to the second sighting of the ghost, where Horatio and marcellus are there as well. In act 1 scene 4 there is a back and forth between Hamlet, Horatio and Marcellus in which the latter two urge Hamlet not to follow the ghost, but Hamlet brushes them off. After he has departed, Horatio says, "He waxes desperate with imagination" This suggests that he was hallucinating this ghost appearance as well.

In testament of my previous point is Freud's theory. His theory was that Someone is crazy due to events that happened during childhood. There is a quote in the play that says that Hamlet's father was not there when he was born. This is probably the most important event in one's childhood and since he wasn't there then it suggests that he was away for most of his childhood, leading to a bad upbringing and hence, madness. Another point that supports Freuds theory and Hamlets madness is how the ghost always appears at a bad time. It had first appeared right when Hamlet was getting over his fathers death. Since the ghost is probably a recreation of Hamlets memory of him it suggests that his father wasn't loving and caring, but rather rude and intruding.

On the other hand there is strong evidence that Hamlet is just putting on an antic disposition when he says " I am but mad north-north-west: when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw" this can be interpreted as Hamlet saying he will pretend to be mad, but he will actually be perfectly sane. This is probably to fool polonius into thinking he is safe while Hamlet attempts to murder him. It could also be to cover up his tracks and as an excuse if he does

manage to do it.

Overall it is possible to conclude that in the beginning of the play Hamlet is pretending to be crazy, but as the play progresses he does such a convincing job of it that he manages to convince himself that he is mad. Therefore I think that Hamlet had started out pretending, but then he actually did become mad.