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Clintwood High
AP English
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Hamlet's Madness

Prince Hamlet, in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, is not mad, in terms of sanity. However, he is very mad, in terms of anger, at many of the people that surround him. Hamlet is mainly mad at Gertrude and, most of all, Claudius. Although he is extremely angry with Claudius and his own whole situation of his father being murdered; his mother marrying his father's murderer; and his lady friend not talking to him, Hamlet remains sane in order to carry out his plan of revenge. The madness that has appeared to grip Hamlet is an act played out by him. In order to accomplish the act of revenge on his uncle, Hamlet must have pretended to be mad so that the people of the court would not look upon him with suspicion.

Points that suggest that Hamlet is actually insane are scattered throughout the play but many of these are the court's impression of Hamlet. The impression of the court is a false impression because Hamlet has made the members of the court think that he is mad so that he may carry out his master plan. Hamlet is a slyer and more deceptive character than most critics give credit. All of the evidence that points to Hamlet being mad is just a cover for Hamlet in the grand scheme that he has placed together. Hamlet's appearance of being "ungartered" (Shakespeare 2.1.77), as well as his strange words and phrases are just a disguise. He succeeds in his convincing of people that he is mad because Polonius, as well as the rest of the court, speaks on his strange behavior. Hamlet's plan could then be carried out if he was not seen a threat to the crown.

Hamlet immediately stresses that his madness is a mask put upon him by himself when he stated, "...to put an antic disposition on" (Shakespeare 1.5.72). This means that Hamlet was going to put on an appearance of being mad. He admitted to himself that he was not mad by saying this and that he was only going to pretend to be mad. If Hamlet openly admits his true intentions to himself, we must trust that his actions are part of his plan. Although, many things lead us to believe that Hamlet was actually mad, he says his behavior is intentional, and there is no hard evidence to prove otherwise. We, as readers, cannot assume that he is actually mad. We can look at his actions and infer that he is mad, but the only real proof of his sanity is his own statement. Hamlet directly tells the readers that he is only pretending to be crazy. Therefore, all the evidence that point to Hamlet as being crazy is unreliable, because his actions are pretended.

Hamlet gives the audience the appearance that is he hesitant to kill Claudius for many reasons. These reasons include moral issues, religious issues, and depression; yet, Hamlet waits because he chooses to do so. Hamlet gives proof of his intention to wait when he says, "The time is out of joint; O cursed spite that ever I was born to set it right" (Shakespeare 1.5.189-90). He is saying that the time to take revenge was not immediately after the murder. Hamlet, therefore, pretends to be mad, in order to maintain safety while he waits for the right time to strike.

Although Hamlet manages to convince the court that he is unstable long enough so that he may avoid being killed while formulating his plan of revenge, Claudius becomes suspicious of his behavior. Even Claudius questions Hamlet's supposed madness.

Claudius states, “Was not like madness. There is something in his soul” (Shakespeare 3.1.172). This statement proves that someone besides Hamlet realizes that he is not actually mad, but rather, there is method to his mayhem.

Near the end of the play, Hamlet, again, reveals his plan of disguise. This time, however, he reveals his plan to Gertrude when he says, “That I essentially am not in madness, but mad in craft” (Shakespeare 3.4.187-88). This repetition of his plan proves that Hamlet was truly not mad but just so precise and specific in planning every detail of his elaborate scheme that he seemed mad to the people in the court. He was so “mad in craft” that he went to the extremes in executing his plan of revenge. Hamlet was so furious with Claudius, that he engulfed himself in his plan and carried it out right down to the words he spoke and every little action he did.

In conclusion, Hamlet avoids allowing everyone know that he is planning hostile actions against Claudius. Even though Claudius and Polonius suspect that Hamlet knows the truth behind the murder of King Hamlet, Hamlet is able to disguise his intentions of revenge long enough so that he may wait for the right time to strike. The only proof that Hamlet is actually insane comes in the form of his actions and speech. Now, if Hamlet specifically says that his actions and speech are just a disguise, can they be used as evidence that he is unstable? Certainly not. Hamlet’s madness was an act; a disguise to draw attention away from his vengeful plan to murder Claudius for enough time to allow Hamlet to wait for the right time to strike. Hamlet must wait for the right time to act and plan his revenge, so, what better way to reduce his threat to Claudius than to make everyone believe that he had lost his mind.

Works Cited

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