**Hamlet**’**s madness**

Madness is one of the features of revenge play. Shakespeare too make uses of madness in his play. King Lear serves as an example of the fact. In Hamlet, too the element of madness is used. However, madness of Hamlet is a vexed question. Whether Hamlet’s madness is feigned or not is really one of the problems, which we face in the course of our reading of the play. Opinions are divided on these issues. To some, it appears that Hamlet really becomes mad, as he is suppressed circumstances. To these critics, Hamlet is as mad as can be. To a few critics, Hamlet is half- mad. Others say that Hamlet’s madness is feigned. To these critics, Hamlet is the sanest man in all Denmark. In this way, whether his madness is real or not remains a serious problem. Both these facts can be justified or refuted as follows.

**1-Hamlet madness is real**

Several critics opine that the madness of Hamlet is real. Certainly, they have given grounds for their thinking.

First, Ophelia distraction of Hamlet’s strange behavior to her when he called on her in disordered clothes supports this view.

Secondly, the manner in which Hamlet speaks with Polonius and used the two courtiers, to Ophelia, the king seems to confirm the view. Similarly, the causeless murder of Polonius also is a support to the view; it is true that he does not know who is hiding behind the curtain. Perhaps he thought that the king was hidden there. However, why one is likely to think him mad at this time is that the king was hidden there.

**Thirdly**, another piece of evidence that supports the theory of Hamlets madness is his behavior at Ophelia funeral. Hamlet steps forward and follows suit. When the two grappling with each other, Hamlet warns him that he will kill him and then makes a speech in which he challenges Laertes to complete with him in expressing grief over Ophelia’s death. So, the Queen says “This is mere madness”.

**Finally,** the **nunnery** scene and **play within play** scene also show that Hamlet seems to be relay mad. He insults Ophelia. He asks her never to get married but to go to a nunnery. In the play scene, Hamlet makes several obscene remarks to Ophelia. In the nunnery scene, the way he has spoken to Ophelia convinces her that he is mad. She speaks in soliloquy “Oh, what a noble mind is here overthrown”. In this soliloquy, Ophelia contrasts what Hamlet used to be with what he has now become.

**2-Hamlet madness in not real**

Through a few critics have said that Hamlet is really insane, most of the critics today refuse it. Many evidence can be proved that Hamlet**’**s madness is only assumed.

**First**, the soliloquies show him as a scholar and philosopher. His generalisation in them shows his wisdom. Take for example the following remarks:

\*“Frailty thy name is woman”.

\*“That one may smile and smile, and be a villain”.

\*“To be or not to be that is the question”.

The soliloquies are not only regnant with wisdom but are also remarkable for there to “catch the conscience of the king”. Such plan could not been formed by an insane person. Thus, the soliloquies of Hamlet prove that he is not mad.

**Secondly**, both Polonius and the king speak that Hamlet is not mad. They do not believe in his madness. In an aside, Polonius comments:

“Though this be madness. Yet there is method in it”

We also hear the king speaking to Polonius

“Love? his affection do not that way tend

Nor what he speak, though it lacked form

a little was not like madness.”

**Thirdly**, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do not think him to be mad Guildenstern describes Hamlet**’**s condition as “crafty madness”. It means that Hamlet is merely trying to create an impression of madness.

**Fourthly,** the scene in which Hamlet condemns his mother also shows his madness would have brought change in the Queen.

**Fifthly**, Hamlet**’**s sound comments on the art and acting could not come from the lips of an insane man. It is as if Shakespeare himself is speaking here. Hamlet remarks and observation in the gravedigger scene also serve as an example of perfectly sane thinking. His comments on the skulls show the wit and wisdom of Hamlet.

**Finally**, there are many other minor things that shows Hamlets madness is not real, For example, his speeches shows that he is not mad. Similarly, when he is with Horatio he speaks like a sane man. Above all, Hamlet himself has once revealed that his madness is only feigned. He calls it “antic disposition”.