

Hamlet's Madness



Hamlet seems normal when we first meet him, bar some bitterness amid his grief over his father's death. He determines to feign madness in order to ferret out the truth of his father's murder. However, as the play progresses, the madness of Hamlet seems less an act and more real. Discuss the stages of Hamlet's madness, trying to determine, scene by scene, whether or if Hamlet is actually losing his grip.

Act 1: Meeting the Ghost; the murder revealed.

Hamlet's State of Mind:

Act 2: Ophelia rejects Hamlet; Hamlet goes 'Mad'.

Hamlet's State of Mind:

Act 3: Murder Confirmed; missed opportunities for revenge.

Hamlet's State of Mind:

Act 4: Revenge at the cost of many lives.

Hamlet's State of Mind:

Analysis: Yorick's Skull



From the time he learned that his father's death was a murder (and maybe even before that), Hamlet is inundated with the notion of death: his father's, his own, and that of the murdering uncle he has vowed revenge on. Several passages in the play — including two of Hamlet's soliloquies — deal with reality and meaning of death. Discuss these lines and their meaning.

Act I, Scene 2, lines 129 to 159

Act III, Scene 1, lines 56 to 88

Act IV, Scene 3, lines 16 to 36

Act V, Scene 1, lines 70 to 202

Act V, Scene 2, lines 205 to 209

Ophelia's Dilemma



Ophelia's death is ruled a suicide in the play, yet Gertrude reports that her death was accidental. Is this Gertrude trying to spare Laertes' feelings? Or was this an inconsistency in the play itself. Why did Ophelia kill herself? Discuss the possible reasons.

She could not disobey her brother and father, yet she loved Hamlet.

Hamlet's behavior and demands upon her were too much to bear.

The murder of her father drove her mad with grief.

**She was little better than the property of the men in her life.
Denied self-determination, suicide was the only way out.**