

Madness and Insanity in Shakespeare's Hamlet - The Sanity of Ophelia

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The Impact of Madness on Ophelia of Hamlet

Without question, the role of madness in Hamlet is as vital to the plot and the play's success as Hamlet himself; neither the character nor the play would be able to function without the driving (although somewhat sluggish) force that madness represents. The connection of one to the other, of character to condition, is so intertwined and entangled that [Hamlet](#) has come to symbolize the particular form of [madness](#) (i.e. melancholy brought about by a humoral imbalance) with which he is afflicted. Indeed, any discussion of Hamlet would be grossly incomplete without an examination of the madness (or lack thereof) from which he suffers; similarly, any discussion of melancholy would, perhaps, border on invalid were it to neglect the obvious connection to the world's most famous literary example. What is overlooked, however, are the effects and the drastically different results of the same condition (or at least, a condition that closely parallels Hamlet's) on the play's second most confounding character, [Ophelia](#).

Early in the play (Act 1, Scene 2), during the first of many insightful soliloquies (insightful

for us as much for him), Hamlet utters, somewhat offhandedly, a summation of his feelings towards his mother's "o'erhasty marriage": "Frailty thy name is woman." Offensive though the quip may be to women of contemporary society (and any not quite passive women of Shakespeare's era), Hamlet's comment was, in many respects, indicative of the prevailing attitude, at least among most men, of the time. Although exceptions to the social system were far from nonexistent (Queen Elizabeth being the most obvious example), women were discriminated against to such an extent...

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