

Sample 1.2

The second sample introduction summarizes the responses of Hamlet and Ophelia to the maddening circumstances in which they find themselves. He lashes outward, first verbally and then violently with his “*rash and bloody*” (3.4) stabbing of Polonius; she retreats inward and ultimately surrenders in despair to death.

“*The canker galls the infants of the spring*” (1.3)—in this essay, I will argue that this line from Laertes can be viewed as a summary of the underlying theme of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. It is a play where the older generation destroys the younger—first, by driving them into maddening circumstances (“*he shall not choose but fall*”, 4.7; “*I cannot choose but weep*”, 4.5), and, then, into the grave.

Over the past century, psychologists have offered clinical diagnoses of Hamlet and Ophelia as if Shakespeare’s dramatic characters were patients afflicted by some mental disability. In my opinion, although Hamlet and Ophelia respond in opposite ways to their dilemmas, there is nothing in either’s behavior that differs significantly from how a mentally well, ‘normal’ person would react had they been subjected to similar stresses.

Hamlet’s put on “*antic disposition*” (1.5) provides him with an outlet to vent his rage and enables the prince to cling to his sanity amidst the “*sea of troubles*” (3.1) that engulf him. In contrast, the submissive and isolated Ophelia carries the pain of her continual silencing and humiliation inside her until her sanity collapses under its weight and she surrenders to death in a “*weeping brook*” (4.7).

In summary, I see *Hamlet* as not so much a play about mad characters; rather it is a portrayal of characters who struggle to endure in a maddening world of deception and betrayal where neither is free to follow the advice given to Laertes: “*To thine own self be true*” (1.2).
