

## **Malingering madness : Edgar and Hamlet / by J. Foster Palmer.**

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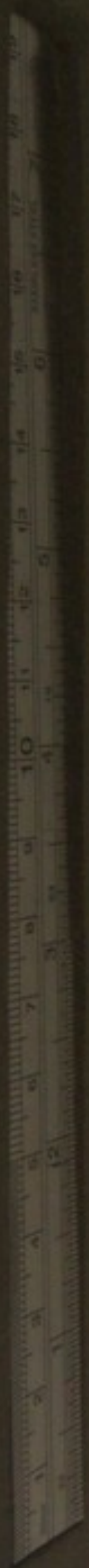
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MALINGERING MAD

By J.

FRENCH insanity is not among criminals and those who rise the higher or more into Lear and Hamlet were the Workmen's Compensation Act belonged to the future railway companies from which present most fruitful and persistent. But it has always escape military service, and begging impostors and un- bodily ailment, blindness, epilepsy, and would often ca of the body. Such proceed detection was, and still is, at of Suspect in Henry VI. Mindless and lameness to e were deceived by him, excep was just the form of mal- efficient intelligence to e some insanity. It was same is the case with th (Act III, Scene 2). Would Falstaff's press. These we rarely capable of the sin shared enough, however, so that a jolious bribe would any degree of perfection in t

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## MALINGERING MADNESS: EDGAR AND HAMLET.

By J. FOSTER PALMER.

FEIGNED insanity is not a common form of malingering, except among criminals and those accused of crime, and of these only, as a rule, the higher or more intellectual types. At the time when "King Lear" and "Hamlet" were written the "Employers' Liability Act," the "Workmen's Compensation Acts," and the "National Insurance Act" belonged to the future, and there were no railways and no railway companies from which to claim compensation, so that the present most fruitful and potent incentives to malingering were non-existent. But it has always been employed to obtain money, to escape military service, and to avoid punishment, malice, or vengeance. Begging impostors and unwilling conscripts used to simulate some bodily ailment, blindness, lameness, deafness, paralysis, and even epilepsy, and would often cause artificial ulceration on various parts of the body. Such proceedings were comparatively easy, and their detection was, and still is, attended with some difficulty. In the case of Simpcox in Henry VI., Part II (Act II, Scene 1), who shammed blindness and lameness to extort money, the King and his whole court were deceived by him, except Humphrey Duke of Gloucester. This was just the form of malingering a man of this type would have sufficient intelligence to carry out. He would never attempt to assume insanity. It was far beyond his mental capacity. The same is the case with the malingerers in Henry IV., Part II (Act III, Scene 2), Mouldy and Bullcalf, who wanted to escape Falstaff's press. These were of a still lower mental type, and hardly capable of the simplest form of malingering. They were shrewd enough, however, so far to gauge Falstaff's character as to see that a judicious bribe would have a more potent effect with him than any degree of perfection in the art of feigning diseases.

The feigning of insanity is a far more difficult and complicated form of malingering, and one which demands a high degree of intelligence, some education, and considerable powers of observation. Suitably, its exposition is assigned in the plays to two men of noble birth and breeding, presumably having had the best education the

times afforded, and of great intellectual potentiality. In both cases the motive is practically the same. Edgar feigns madness in order to disguise himself and thus escape the sentence which had been passed on him by means of a false accusation. Hamlet feigns madness to escape the murderous intentions of the King, who would stop at nothing to compass the destruction of so formidable and clever a rival, if he could by any means convince others of danger from his presence.

In neither case was it necessary to adhere to the simulation of any special or well-defined form of insanity, as it would be in the present day. Edgar, having already assumed the garb and appearance of a beggar, was not likely to be examined by an expert as to the state of his mind. His assumption of imbecility was only a further development of his disguise, in order to make assurance doubly sure. He merely copied the diction of the village idiot, with additions of his own, not always consistent with the original intention, but suitable for the hearing of those with whom at first he happened to come in contact. Malingering for money was evidently as prevalent in Shakespeare's time as it is now. Edgar enumerates the usual cunning devices employed for exciting sympathy and extorting alms, the artificially produced ulcers, still so common among this class, the local complaints, as well as the whining pitiful tales, in which they are such adepts, the alternate prayers and curses we are all so familiar with.

“*Bedlam* beggars, who, with roaring voices,  
Strike in their numb'd and mortified bare arms  
Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary ;  
And with this horrible object, from low farms,  
Poor pelting villages, sheep-cotes, and mills,  
Sometimes with *lunatic* bans, sometimes with prayers,  
Enforce their charity.”—(“*King Lear*,” Act II, Sc. 3, 14-20.)

The words “*Bedlam*”\* and “*lunatic*”† imply, of course, that Edgar considered these fraudulent cadgers to be insane, and that he intended to feign their mental condition. In cases of feigned insanity, the question usually arises as to the possibility of the supposed reason for feigning madness being, instead, the *cause* of *genuine* madness. A false accusation, for instance, might cause a shock, and produce insanity. This, we know, was not the case with Edgar. His

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\*The word “*Bedlam*,” of course, is an anachronism, as Bethlehem Hospital was not founded until 1547. The use of the word in this sense, however, shows that it had already, by the end of the 16th century, become a familiar generic term for the victims of mental disorder.

†The expression “*lunatic bans*” implies a charitable construction by the author of the curses with which beggars load those who refuse to bestow money upon them. The *prayers* are real, the *curses* are due to insanity. “Charity thinketh no evil.”

reasons are all fully and sanely explained. It is in the middle of the second act that he thus puts forward his intended methods of proceeding. It is not till nearly the middle of the third act that we see him beginning to put them into action. Here, after uttering a few meaningless words, he enters, "disguised as a madman," whatever may be the exact meaning intended to be conveyed by that expression. In the present day a madman is not always distinguished by his clothes any more than a gentleman is. In Shakespeare's time, however, fantastical apparel, or a deficiency of it, was, no doubt, thought to indicate a corresponding mental defect, as is still the case. He has evidently been rehearsing his part, and is determined to keep well to the fore the idea of ocular illusions. Demons, by preference. The more so, as these easily suggest, and assimilate with, any vices which may have been supposed to bring about his present mental condition. This theme, insanity as the natural sequence of vice, he finds such an attractive one that he enlarges upon it. So well, indeed, does he declaim on the effects of gambling, drunkenness, luxury, and licentiousness that he certainly would not have deceived an alienist expert. With such an audience, however, it mattered not. Lear was already insane in actual fact. The Fool, fool on one side and philosopher on the other, was hardly a person of even mental balance; while Kent, like himself, was incognito, a fugitive from vengeance.

But suddenly an unexpected danger arises. Without any warning his father joins the strange group, and he is in danger of instant recognition and exposure. He has sufficient judgment and presence of mind to abandon his philosophic vein, and fall back on his hallucination. He now gives it a name, Flibbertigibbet. He talks black magic, and recites unmeaning rhymes, all in a feigned voice, which, no doubt, he has assumed throughout. He escapes recognition, however, more by luck than wit, even here. For Gloucester was so overwhelmed by the ill treatment of the King by his daughters, and his present pitiable plight, that he has no thought to bestow on his wretched companions. For Edgar has again lapsed into most injudicious language by recounting his follies, and thus proclaiming his own insanity. An expert examiner would have discovered him immediately. Lunatics are not usually obtrusive, but attempt, as a rule, to conceal their aberrations. Fortunately for Edgar, however, Gloucester had had no training in psychological medicine, and shortly leaves him to make preparations for the safety of the King. Still, the meeting had not been without danger to Edgar, though he may not have been aware of the fact. It was Gloucester's pre-occupation which saved him. A suspicion had crossed his mind, not from any knowledge of the symptoms of insanity, but probably from some resemblance in the

voice or figure.\* The clue he had not followed up, and appears to have forgotten. The next day, however, when he is blind, the consciousness of it returns, the latent idea comes to the front:—

“T’ the last night’s storm I such a fellow saw,  
Which made me think a man a worm: *my son*  
Came then into my mind; and yet my mind  
Was then scarce friends with him: I have heard more since.”  
—(“King Lear,” Act IV, Sc. 1, 34-37.)

A kind of “unconscious cerebration” had been going on in Edgar’s presence, and the sudden loss of sight had stimulated his mental powers and brought the half-formed thought to his waking intelligence. Yet, even now, though the sight or proximity of Edgar had brought Edgar to his mind, he fails to connect the two ideas. The dirty, ragged condition, and assumed voice of Edgar had saved him from recognition, not his pretence of insanity. Gloucester, even, had never been quite convinced by this pretence, but attached no importance to it one way or the other.

“He has some reason, else he could not beg” (line 33).

He is quite content, too, to put himself entirely under his guidance:—

“’Tis the times’ plague, when madmen lead the blind” (line 48),

he says, to induce the old man to leave him alone with Edgar, not to express his own belief. Edgar continues, however, to attempt to keep up the rôle of insanity, though with even less skill and consistency than before. He proclaims his own imbecility, speaks of former illusions, or fiends as he calls them, but which he explains away as personified vices.

“Poor Tom hath been scared out of his good wits.”  
“Five fiends have been in poor Tom at once;  
of lust, as Obidicut, etc.—(59-62).

His “daubing,” as he calls it, becomes, at this point, very feeble. There is, indeed, now no further actual occasion for it. His father has found out the truth about the treachery of Edmund, and knows him to have been falsely accused. Apparently he soon gave up the attempt to feign insanity, finding it, perhaps, a more difficult task than he had imagined, and even seems to have lapsed into his natural voice, for when next we are brought in contact with them Gloucester says:—

“Methinks thy voice is alter’d, and thou speak’st  
In better phrase and matter than thou didst’t.”

—(Act IV. Sc. 6, lines 7, 8.)

Unless Edgar’s voice were like Falstaff’s reasons, “as plentiful as

\* As I read it, there seems to be a suggestion here, on the part of the author, of telepathic influence or communication between Gloucester and Edgar, obstructed, perhaps, to some extent, by the unwillingness of Edgar to be recognised, or, to put it more correctly, the earnest wish of Edgar *not* to be recognised. This is quite in accordance with the author’s psychological methods.

blackberries," he must be now speaking in his own. That Gloucester should not have recognised him under these circumstances is almost inconceivable. But probability has here, as in many other cases, to give way to dramatic effect. If capable of explanation at all, it is by assuming that the appearance and the surroundings of Edgar as seen in the hovel were stereotyped on his mental vision, and, at the same time, that the shock of the terrible operation, the "surgical" fever following it, and the brain exhaustion which would necessarily attend the healing process, had so enfeebled his mental powers that he was unable to make a reasonable deduction.

This, however, is outside the subject with which we are immediately concerned, which is the feigned madness of Edgar. It was recently stated by a well-known authority on mental disease\* that "the feigning of insanity is one of the most difficult things in the world:—A man who can simulate madness must be a perfect actor, and could easily make a fortune in that capacity." Such an actor Edgar, certainly, was not. His methods were crude, and only adapted to carry conviction to the feeblest intelligencies. It was only by a sequence of fortuitous coincidences that he escaped detection throughout. In the presence of an expert the fraud would have been exposed in a few minutes. The only point in which he showed any soundness of judgment was in the choice of type, which seems to be that of amentia in the form of congenital imbecility. Here, however, he gets hopelessly adrift in the matter of etiology, which he ought never to have mentioned, or professed to have any knowledge of. Licentiousness and drunkenness, the causes he chiefly refers to, were more likely to have culminated in melancholia or mania.

"Wine I loved deeply, dice dearly, and in woman  
out-paramoured the Turk."—(Act III, Sc. 4, lines 93, 94.)

He is too obviously introspective. Not content with feigning insanity, he must needs proclaim it, which is fatal. His acquaintance with witchcraft is quite reasonable. He would have learned about this from the country folk:—

"Bless thee from whirlwinds, star-blasting, and taking."  
—(Act III, Sc. 4, lines 60, 61.)

and

"He gives the web and the pin, squints the eye,  
and makes the harelip; mildews the white wheat,  
and hurts the poor creatures of earth."—(Sc. 4, 22-24.)

But he then repeats his self-assertion of insanity:—

"Poor Tom; that eats the swimming-frog, etc."—(Sc. 4, lines 134 *et seq.*)

He is on fairly safe ground so long as he sticks to the supposed hallucinations, "the foul fiends," as he calls them, but when he begins

\* Dr. T. B. Hyslop, late Superintendent of Bethlehem Hospital.



to differentiate and multiply them, assigning to each its special corresponding vice, he is showing himself in too reasonable and contemplative a light, and is running into danger. Still more so, when he boasts of certain mad accomplishments which had existed only in his imagination, especially as the veracity, or, rather, the possibility, of his statements might have been easily tested. He would hardly have been able to avert discovery if he had been suddenly asked to give a practical demonstration of his method of eating a "swimming frog" or swallowing an "old rat." (Sc. 4, lines 134-137.)

"A credulous father, and a brother noble,  
Whose nature is so far from doing harms  
That he suspects none."—(Act I, Sc. 2, 195-197.)

This remark of Edmund aptly describes both father and son. The credulity of Gloucester may help to explain, not only his ready acceptance of Edmund's lying accusations, but also, on the other hand, his continued belief in the assumed personality of Edgar. Edgar, again, noble, generous, unsuspecting, "far from doing harms," unaccustomed to attempt to deceive others, was absolutely devoid of the equipment necessary for the extremely difficult task he had set himself, of feigning madness; a task which requires not only a personal study of the various forms of mental disease, but a natural gift of observation and mimicry, as well as frequent practice in the attempt to deceive. Whether the defects in Edgar's personation of a lunatic were intentional or otherwise on the part of the author I have no opinion to offer.

The question is not entirely a psychological one, and it is quite conceivable that the author, however clear his inspiration might be as to the workings of his own mind, would be subject to certain limitations in estimating the effect of their expression when conveyed to others, from the lack of practical experience in the matter. On the other hand, it is quite consistent with the generous, honest, and unsuspecting character of Edgar that he should expose himself to failure and detection on this his first attempt at deception. In any case, it is fairly certain that the exigences of the play overrode every other consideration. Still it was a concession to probability that the scene was laid in Britain at a period some thousand years before the Christian era. At that period of our history the attempts of Edgar might be supposed to pass muster. Anyone attempting the same rôle in the present day, when psychological experts are by no means scarce, would be well-advised to undergo a little preliminary training in an asylum, and also endeavour to acquire by practice some proficiency in the mimetic art.

*(To be continued.)*

MALINGERING MADNESS: EDGAR AND HAMLET.

By J. FOSTER PALMER.

(Continued from page 362.)

OF a very different and far more subtle character is the feigning of Hamlet. The earliest hint of this intention is conveyed at the close of the first act. He is already depressed with melancholic gloom, and has seen, or believes he has seen, his father's disembodied spirit. The whole situation stands out clear before him. He has completely solved the difficult problem he had set himself—by supernatural aid, he believes, but really by his own intuition, combined, as it was, with deep and subtle powers of reasoning and observation. He is a born detective. The various clues have been worked out and unravelled in his mind, and he sees the whole history of the crime from its sordid commencement to its tragic close. "He knows, but knows not that he knows." He is hardly aware, even now, except, perhaps, in his inner consciousness, of the absolute truth and correctness of his conclusions. He returns, however, with increased conviction to his friends, Horatio and Marcellus. At first, overwhelmed with horror, he hardly knows what to say to them. He evades their questions with tautological platitudes. Horatio, accustomed to love and confidence from him, feels the change, and suspects his sanity. "These are but wild and whirling words, my lord" (Act I, Scene 5, line 133), he says. Hamlet at once takes up the cue. He determines to feign insanity, and to take his two friends into his confidence:—

HAMLET.— "And now, good friends,  
 As you *are* friends, scholars and soldiers,  
 Give me one poor request."—(Lines 39-42.)  
 "Never to speak of this that you have seen."—(Line 152.)  
 "Never to speak of this that you have heard. —(Line 159.)  
 "never, so help you mercy,  
 How strange or odd soe'er I bear myself,  
 As I, perchance, hereafter shall think meet  
 To put an antic disposition on—  
 . . . . . to note  
 That you know aught of me."—(Lines 169-179.)

All this, of course, they duly swear. "The bearing of these remarks lies in the application of them," as Captain Bunsby would say. It is some time before we come to any evidence of this intention being carried out. In Act II, Scene 1, we have an account of his strange interview with Ophelia. Whatever impression this description is intended to convey, it is certainly not that of assumed madness. It is far too real, too intense. It is, indeed, more closely connected with his real malady. He has tracked his father's murderer, and feels that the burden of vengeance is laid upon him. There is no feigning here. There are two real forces at work. One is the obsession as to the duty of revenge, to the exclusion of all other objects; the other is the loss of his belief in female virtue, caused by his mother's fall. Both are impelling him with resistless force to convince Ophelia that all is over between them. He is performing a duty, or what he conceives to be a duty, of the most intensely painful kind, and his soul is shaken to its foundations. Both Polonius and Ophelia are convinced that he is insane. In a certain sense, they are right, but they are both absolutely at fault as to the cause. The King sees further. For he knows what Hamlet also knows, but others do not, and he tries to trace it independently with the help of his two spies, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The first actual attempt at feigning is in the interview with Polonius. This is a very subtle piece of work, a mixture of truth and nonsense, of thoughtful conclusions and inconsequent rambling. (Act II, Sc. 2, lines 170-223). It is really a fine piece of acting. He professes at first not to know Polonius; then makes it doubtful whether he does or not; then, evidently knowing or suspecting Polonius's opinion of him, refers to Ophelia. Then, seeing Polonius convinced of his madness, goes on to rally him on the "defects of age," and with such point that Polonius sagely concludes that his madness has "method in't," and that certain forms of insanity seem to possess the power to extemporise prompt replies "which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be delivered of" (212-214). His success with Polonius, at any rate, is complete.

With Rosencrantz and Guildenstern he takes a different method. He partially, but not entirely, takes them into his confidence. He changes his tone when they appear, and again when Polonius re-enters. He makes no secret to them of the fact that he is, to use a modern phrase, "pulling Polonius's leg." Clearly this method would be unsuitable in their case. He suspects them from the first, knows they have been sent by the King to spy upon his actions, and determines to sound them to the bottom, and find out the King's real motives. Accordingly he pretends to trust them, and, entirely discarding his inconsequential ramblings, describes, in some detail, what must have

been his actual sensations. For this speech gives a perfectly accurate account of the usual symptoms of melancholia, and is, indeed, often quoted in works on psychology to describe them. It is more usual, no doubt, for melancholic patients to be secretive, but I have known cases in which there has been a strong desire to communicate their feelings to others. In this case there were special seasons for disclosure, but the desire may have existed as well, and the recital thus served a double purpose. In melancholia the sights and scenes most likely to produce an agreeable sensation only seem to deepen the feeling of depression:—

HAMLET.—“I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth, foregone all custom of exercises; and, indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o’erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours.”—(Act II, Sc. 2, 309-315.)

It has been said that the acme of diplomacy consists in telling the exact truth, for nobody will believe it. This, indeed, appears to have been the effect Hamlet’s conversation produced on the two spies, for, in their subsequent interview with the King, they speak of it as “*crafty madness*.” Yet even his professed ignorance of the cause of his condition (“wherefore I know not”), which annoyed them so much, may have been literally true, for the origin of the melancholic condition was probably antecedent to those mental shocks and illusions which *seemed* to bring it about. His statement that the King and Queen were deceived as to his condition and that he is but mad north-north-west only serves to confirm their opinion.

ROS.—“He does confess he feels himself distracted;  
But from what cause he will by no means speak.”

GUIL.—“Nor do we find him forward to be sounded;  
But, with a *crafty madness*, keeps aloof,\*  
When we would bring him on to some confession  
Of his true state.”—(Act III, Sc. 1, 5-10.)

But the great test is to come. He has convinced Polonius, he has convinced Ophelia, he has convinced the King’s two spies, that he is insane: separately, and by different methods. The Queen is convinced chiefly by what she hears. The King alone remains, at least, uncertain, and strongly suspecting—and guiltily fearing—that Hamlet has, by some means, discovered the secret of his father’s murder, and is feigning madness in order to carry out his revenge.

KING.—“And can you, by no drift of circumstance,  
Get from him why he *puts on* this confusion?”

—(Act III, Sc. 1, lines 1, 2.)

\* This indicates the excellence of the feigning. To “keep aloof” is just what a real madman would do,

Claudius seems, in this speech, to have assumed the fictitious character of Hamlet's insanity, and unintentionally given expression to his thought. He, therefore, in the second part of it, endeavours to explain away his words, and thus leaves the whole rather ambiguous.

KING.—“Grating so harshly all his days of quiet  
With turbulent and *dangerous lunacy.*”—(Lines 3, 4.)

This, of course, may mean anything. What he wants to get at is the origin of the trouble. *Why* is he thus mad or feigning madness?—and then—

The King, though a criminal and a drunkard, is by no means a fool. On the contrary, he is a man of a high intellectual type, as well as a highly-strung nervous organisation, a possession which gives him little peace from the reproaches of conscience. The most remote, the most casual reference to crime throws him into agonies of remorse and despair. A common-place platitude by Polonius calls forth a self-torturing but unrepentant soliloquy:—

KING.                   “O, 'tis too true !  
How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience !  
The harlot's cheek, beautied with plastering art,  
Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it,  
Than is my deed to my most painted word :  
O heavy burthen !—(Act III, Sc. 1, lines 49-54.)

Then again, after the play scene:—

KING.—“O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven !”  
—(Act III, Sc. 3, line 36.)

In the cunning and well-conceived trap he now sets for Hamlet, this complex mental nature is a most valuable weapon. Upon the whole, the two opponents are well matched. Hamlet has, no doubt, the higher intellect, but, on the other hand, the King has had the actual experience of crime, and, in spite of his attitude towards the past, an absolute absence of scruple with regard to the future.

Hamlet has now to feign, not, as before, individually, but collectively. He has to convince three differently constituted minds all at once. He had before taken care to suit his words to his hearers. Now he cannot, for he is probably aware that he is being watched, and that the King is among the watchers.

Hamlet's interview with Ophelia is, upon the whole, a masterpiece of acting. Yet, as I read it, it comprised a single flaw (possibly unintended, but more probably intentional and irresistible), which gave away the whole show.

Its general cleverness is shown in the fact that Ophelia and Polonius remain convinced:—

OPH.—“O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown.”  
—(Act III, Sc. 1, line 158.)

Polonius, too, not only continues to believe in his madness, but still believes it to have been caused by his love for Ophelia (Ib., lines 184-186). Meanwhile the King had taken note where they had not. Hamlet had said "those that are married already, *all but one*, shall live:" (Ib., lines 154-155). And the King's conscience had rightly pointed out to him the identity of that one exception. This has given him the clue. He has fathomed the whole mystery. He knows now that Hamlet is feigning. He knows what is preying on his mind. He knows that he is plotting against him, and immediately resolves to take his life. His discovery, however, he keeps to himself, and for the present, professes to accept the prevalent view of the Prince's madness. This is the line of least resistance, and that which will, he thinks, best justify any high-handed proceedings he may be disposed to take, and also explain any tragedy that might follow them.

KING.—"Love! his affections do not that way tend;  
 Nor what he spake, though it lack'd form a little,  
*Was not like madness.* There's something in his soul,  
 O'er which his *melancholy* sits on brood;  
 And, I do doubt, the hatch, and the disclose,  
 Will be some danger."—(Act III., Sc. 1, lines 170-175.)  
 "Madness in great ones must not unwatch'd go."—(Ib., line 195.)

The pseudo-ravings of Hamlet, when in the presence of Polonius and Ophelia, of course, defy analysis. They are a subtle mixture of consequence and inconsequence. This is as it should be, and shows the excellence of the imitation. He allows verbal suggestions to lead him on quite naturally to entirely remote and unconnective subjects. His remarks, too, are well adapted to his hearers. His occasional "pregnant" utterances are well calculated to weigh with Polonius, who evidently has seen or heard of the "random shots" often made by insane patients. "A happiness that madness often hits on" (Act II, Sc. 2, line 213). "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't" (ib., lines 208-9). At the same time there is no attempt to publish his condition, as in the case of Edgar, nor to assume an almost complete loss of memory, two dangerous pitfalls that would-be maniacs are very liable to fall into. Indeed, if limited to this interview, an expert would have some difficulty in diagnosing the case. The same may be said of the interview with Ophelia. Taken entirely by themselves, without any knowledge of antecedent events, Hamlet's words might pass, in spite of a few more or less logical sequences, as the ravings of a harmless lunatic. But at this interview there was an auditor who had not only full knowledge of all that had gone before, but whose powers of mental penetration were preternaturally sharpened by the terrors of an evil conscience. A slight, casual, or apparently casual, reservation (Act II, Sc. 2, line 155) to a somewhat inconsequent

statement, revealed to him the true state of the case, convinced him of threatened danger to himself, and drove him on to attempt the concealment of one murder by the perpetration of another. "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all," Hamlet had just said, and we have here an exemplification of the statement. The King, ever on the watch, ever fearing detection, seized on a phrase which would have otherwise escaped notice, and traced it truly to its source. To any other auditor it would have meant nothing.

In the play-scene we come upon a strange interaction between Hamlet's real and his feigned mental condition. He had now, for the time, lost his obsession. He had concentrated his attentive control entirely on the evidence he expected to obtain from the effect of the play, and this had, for the present, relieved him of his fearful burden. The result is reaction, a mental rebound, raising him from the depth of gloom to the height of exhilaration. He is now, therefore, in the highest spirits, and makes no effort to control them, or to conceal any thoughts which may happen to enter his mind. And such thoughts are abundant. Now that the cerebral circulation is restored with accumulated force, they rush through the brain in shoals, trampling on one another's heels. If they chance to suggest expressions with a double meaning, the better for his purpose. Such equivocal remarks, which in this scene are fairly numerous, would only serve to convince his hearers that his lucid interval, as they would, and rightly, consider it, was only partial and temporary. The whole scene is a fine piece of acting, based on the uncontrolled expression of normal but exuberant thought. (Act III, Scene 2, lines 98-277.) Left alone with Horatio, his high spirits, for the time, continue, but Horatio understands him. (Ib., lines 282-306.) On the re-entrance of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, although he attempts to keep it up at first, his spirits again begin to fall, his obsession, as is shown by the sequence, returns to him, and while he absolutely mystifies his false friends as to the state of his mind by a strange mixture of shrewdness and inconsequence, he shows them with unmistakable emphasis that he strongly resents their fulsome behaviour and ill-timed interference. (Ib., lines 307-389.) On the return of Polonius he resumes something of his former method, and plies him with obviously incongruous statements, with a view, it would seem, rather of testing the extent of his credulity than confirming him in his opinion. Indeed, he now seems almost aggrieved to find that he had been so completely successful in convincing Polonius of his mental derangement.

"They fool me to the top of my bent."—(Act III, Sc. 2, lines 389-401.)

In Hamlet's interview with his mother there is no feigning. His

words here are well thought out. But the Queen had believed him to be insane, and the hallucination which he experienced during the interview naturally, for the time, confirmed her opinion, and she would not be likely to be able to differentiate between two different forms of insanity.

QUEEN.—“Alas ! he’s mad !”—(Act III, Sc. 4, line 105.)  
 “This is the very coinage of your brain :  
 This bodiless creation ecstasy  
 Is very cunning in.”—(Ib., lines 137-139.)

At first she believes and grieves over his madness, but very shortly after she accepts it willingly, taking refuge in it, to avoid worse evils. “Perhaps,” after all, she thinks, “Hamlet’s censures on her conduct were only the ravings of a madman. Why take them to heart ?” Then Hamlet, having feigned madness, has to prove to her his sanity. The argument is a masterpiece. It is perfectly scientific and coherent, as well as absolutely convincing. The speech itself is too closely reasoned and well expressed for a man with any symptoms of mania. The tests he proposes, too, as evidence of his sanity, are sound diagnostic symptoms. The normal character of the pulse would be, at least, a *prima facie* sign of mental health, and the offer to paraphrase his former speech without in any degree changing its purport would be about as good a test of sanity as any expert psychologist would be able to devise.

HAMLET—“My pulse, as yours, doth temperately keep time,  
 And makes as healthful music.”—(Act III, Sc. 4, lines 140, 141.)  
 . . . . . “bring me to the test,  
 And I the matter will *re-word* ; which madness  
 Would gambol from.”—(Ib., lines 142-144.)

He has not yet ceased to sustain the rôle of a maniac, but he well knows that, after what he has now said to the Queen, she will never reveal his confidences. Indeed, in describing the interview to the King, she relates his words and deeds in such a way as to confirm in others the opinion of his insanity, though she herself knows it to be an erroneous one.

QUEEN.—“Mad as the sea and wind, when both contend  
 Which is the mightier : in his lawless fit,  
 Behind the arras hearing something stir,  
 Whips out his rapier, cries, *a rat ! a rat !*  
 And, in this brainish apprehension, kills  
 The unseen good old man.”—(Act IV, Scene 1, lines 7-12.)

But, after this interview, he has to resume his feigning. He knows that the King is sending him to England, and clearly suspects his more sinister design, a suspicion in which he is confirmed by the King’s choice of agents. He must avoid any immediate trouble which



might arise from the murder of Polonius, and, for this purpose, elects to assume a further development and intensification of his supposed madness. This would seem to explain the unfortunate occurrence, and to avoid any judicial inquiry, which, at the least, might be inconvenient. Meanwhile, the King and Queen, both aware of its fictitious character, continue, though for different reasons, to profess belief in its reality.

In the next scene (Act IV, Sc. 2) he again mystifies the King's two secret service agents with metaphors and allusions so abstruse that they are quite unable to cope with him, and are constrained to acknowledge it.

ROSENCRANTZ.—“I understand you not, my lord.”

HAMLET.—“I am glad of it: a knavish speech sleeps in a foolish ear.”

—(Act IV, Sc. 2, lines 24-26.)

He had before compared himself to a musical instrument which they were unable to play upon. Now he compares them to a sponge, and warns them, in thinly-veiled metaphors, which, however, they seem too dense to understand, that they are rushing upon their own destruction. They have not even the insight and penetration of Polonius to observe the “method” that was embodied in his apparently inconsequent remarks. Their ignorance and obtuseness are colossal. Hamlet, with an intuitive perception amounting almost to thought-reading, and by means of which he had first discovered his uncle's guilt, has read them through and through. They have no possible chance against his superior intelligence. His struggle is with the King, and their position as go-betweens was, as he subsequently remarked, a “dangerous” one (Act V, Sc. 2, line 60). He even repeats his warning, telling them that he had meant what he said, that his “speech” was “*knavish*,” and directed against them, that they were “fools” not to take warning by it, but that, at the same time, he was “glad” that their “foolish ear” prevented them from understanding it. The merest “lack of form,” as the King had called it, was sufficient to confirm them in their folly, and convince them that all his statements were merely the ramblings of a lunatic. Brought into the King's presence, however, he resumes his more distinctive methods (Act IV, Scene 3, lines 18-55). His remarks here are well adapted to the purpose in hand. His low, jesting conversation on worms, maggots, and decomposing corpses, with the incongruous introduction of heaven and hell into his speech would indicate an essential mental change from his normal condition, and would be calculated to convince anyone who heard it, except one who, like King Claudius, had special cause to know the inward meaning and purpose which lurked behind this apparent madness. This

knowledge, however, had no immediate bearing on Hamlet's course of action. Claudius, for the present, elects to fall in with the popular view, and act on the assumption of Hamlet's insanity. Under the cloak of protecting him against vengeance, he sends him off to meet his doom elsewhere. Hamlet is not deceived by this pretence. His last words may be considered as a warning, or, at any rate, a general assertion, in another of his veiled metaphors, that he fully understands the King's acts and intentions, and Claudius, for the first time, I think, fails to grasp the hidden meaning that underlies his words.

HAMLET.— "Good."

KING.—"So it is, *if thou knew'st our purposes.*"

HAMLET.—"*I see a cherub that sees them.*"—(Act IV., Sc. 3, lines 48-50.)

He knew the King's purposes, yet took no steps to avoid them! Yes. For he knew also that once away from Denmark he was at least away from the actual presence of his clever and unscrupulous enemy. He knew, too, as he had already told his mother, that he was far more than a match for the dull intelligences of the two agents who, as soon as he left Denmark, would be the sole representatives of the King's power and hate against him. He had full confidence in his own mental superiority, and had already threatened, what he afterwards literally carried out, to

"delve one yard below their mines,  
And blow them at the moon."—(Act III, Sc. 4, lines 208, 209.)

It was not till he again came into personal contact with his talented and deadly opponent that the real and equal struggle was resumed, ending, as might be expected, like a drawn game, in the mutual destruction of both.

Not only is the feigning of insanity an extremely difficult task, but the whole subject is an extremely difficult one to deal with, and one that does not commend itself to writers of fiction. It is, indeed, very rarely dealt with in literature. The former difficulty is fully emphasised in the presentation of the two characters before us. It is here shown to consist not so much in the actual knowledge of, and familiarity with, the symptoms to be exhibited, as in certain purely accidental surroundings and in the present mental and moral attitude of those before whom the exhibition takes place. The two examples of mock madness are about as different from one another as it is possible to imagine. Edgar's method is crude, ill-conceived, and unconvincing, while that of Hamlet is subtle, well-considered, and well acted, and calculated to deceive all but the most discerning. Yet the clumsy counterfeiting of Edgar is successful, partly on account of the

environment and the pre-conceived views and lack of mental concentration in those who were witnesses of it, and partly on account of its being combined with a more general all-round counterfeiting of a physical character. On the other hand the clever, highly-elaborated, and well sustained procedure of Hamlet, though admirably adapted to most minds, failed in one important point on account of certain highly abstruse and complex psychological conditions. In other words, the combination of antecedent knowledge, a guilty conscience, a highly strung nervous system and a penetrating intellect, revealed to King Claudius what was hidden from every other eye. The question of expert evidence does not actually arise. There were no professed psychologists in either play. Still, as already observed, an expert, if he were to judge solely from the conversation of Hamlet in some of the scenes in which he feigns madness, would, at the least, experience some difficulty in arriving at a true diagnosis as to his real mental condition.

The question is purely one of psychological, not of [dramatic] interest. The discovery makes no difference to the play. It does not appear that King Claudius, in what he did, was in any way influenced by Hamlet's mental condition, or that he took any steps that he would not equally have taken had he really believed him to be a raving maniac.







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