



Method in the madness

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc. or its Licensors. Please see [copyright information](#) at the end of this document.

Polonius:

What is the matter, my lord?

Hamlet:

Between who?

Polonius:

I mean, the matter that you read, my lord.

Hamlet:

Slanders, sir; for the satirical rogue says here that old men have grey beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plum-tree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams; all which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down, for yourself, sir, shall grow old as I am, if like a crab you could go backward.

Polonius:

[*Aside*] Though this be madness, yet there is method in't.

[Hamlet Act 2, scene 2, 193–206](#)

Our expression, "There's a method in the madness," derives from this comical scene, although we've tampered a bit with the phrasing [*compare* [THE BETTER PART OF VALOR IS DISCRETION](#)]. The politic Polonius, convinced that Hamlet is truly mad, nonetheless recognizes in his speech some "method"—that is, a kind of artfulness and order. Whether he appreciates Hamlet's point is unclear.

Polonius diagnoses Hamlet's madness as a form of "love-melancholy," considered a full-fledged disease in the Renaissance. The old man has ordered his daughter Ophelia, Hamlet's girlfriend, to refuse to see the prince or receive his letters, and Polonius now concludes that such refusals have resulted in Hamlet's sorry state. Hamlet, however, only puts on a show [*see* [ANTIC DISPOSITION](#)].

As a sort of revenge on Polonius, whom he recognizes as one of King Claudius's numerous spies, Hamlet plays the "satirical rogue" and enumerates the debilities of age, pointedly making fun of Polonius. In the process he borrows one of Polonius's own rhetorical tricks: *occupatio*, or *paralepsis*—pretending to pass over or condemn something while actually stating it openly [*see* [MORE MATTER WITH LESS ART](#)].

Copyright Notice

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc.

Shakespeare Quotes: Method in the madness

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

For complete copyright information, please see the online version of this work:

<http://www.enotes.com/shakespeare-quotes>