

Deceit and acting in 'hamlet' and 'the revenger's tragedy essay



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The majority of characters in both texts arguably play a part in order to deceive others at some point, creating a dramatic irony that resonates with the audience and adding comedy to an otherwise somber plot.

However the complex system of acting and deception creates "an elaborate network of roles and relationships" (Michael Hall) that ultimately generates uncertainty within both the contemporary audience and critics in the modern day.

Acting and deceit in Hamlet proves to delay the inevitable, however characters in Revenges deceive others to act as a catalyst, progressing their ambitions and causing the tragic finale to approach at a quicker pace. To a contemporary audience, the latter statement suggests that Revenges would have been more typical of a Revenge Tragedy genre; Hamlet's intelligent, philosophical character sets him apart from classic Revenges and evokes pathos, however the typically male attitude of Vince suggests that Revenges would have been preferred by an Elizabethan audience. Ultimately, the dramatic irony and comedic effect created through acting and deception in both plays serve to lighten the atmosphere of the theatre, "If the quality of humor is important to comedy, it is more so in tragedy, whether in life or theatre" (SSL Herbert Tree), and create uncertainty within the audience as to how far the deception reaches, evoking introverts even in modern viewings. Acting and deceit are imperative to an Elizabethan Revenge tragedy, and in the case of Hamlet and Revenges, characters tend to feign an alternate persona to escape the consequences of their respective revenge plans.

Hamlet simulates a degree of madness in his character in order to deceive the king and his attendants, and thus when he kills Polonium; an act that would have been punishable by death in asses England, he Is Instead shipped off to England, and would have survived the crime unscathed had it not been for Claudia' letter that was unrelated to the Polonium' ruder.

Claudia' exclamation, " how dangerous is that this man goes loose! ' Yet must not we put the strong law on him...

This sending him away must seem/ Deliberate pause.

Diseases desperate grown/ By desperate appliance are relieved,] Or not at all" reveals through structure-reflected meaning the difficulty faced in 1 OFF offence" and " Deliberate pause" in the unrushed iambic pentameter of the monologue reflects the internal struggle of Claudia to bring about Polonium' Justice; the unusual circumstance of Hamlet's madness usurping the moral code associated with punishment of crimes.

Diseases desperate grown" presents the idea of madness as a physical disease, alluding to 16th century renaissance theorist's belief in the four humors'; depicting Hamlet's condition as a disturbance in the four bodily humors and thus Hamlet cannot be blamed for any events that occurred when mad, and Claudia can't " put the strong law on him". Taking this into account, Hamlet's feigned madness effectively relieves him of responsibility for his actions, ultimately using an act to deceive others into viewing him as mentally insufficient and allowing him to enact his revenge plan undetected.

Similarly, Eventide's plan of vengeance allows him to offload responsibility for the deaths of characters using acts and deceiving others through a second persona. Weaning has been personified in the plays language, and the skull has become a costumed actor" (Scott McMillan). McMillan depicts that Vindictive uses Gladiola's skull to enact its own vengeance, relieving him of the guilt involved in the murder.

He uses apostrophe, instructing the skull to " Hide thy face now, for shame, thou Hades need have a mask now;' ' Its vain when beauty flows, but when it fleets,] This would become graves better than the streets". The emotive phrase " for shame" disrupts the rhymed iambic pentameter, illuminating Eventide's apparent disgust at the skull. Emphasis on " now' reflects the pending murder of the Duke, and thus the fact that Vindictive is relaying his to the skull reinforces his belief that Gloria is enacting her own vengeance, rather than him.

Equally, Vindictive uses Plato; his invented alternative persona, to remove any remaining guilt over the Duke's death. He proclaims that Plato is " full mad; he shall not live", linking to Hamlet's feigned madness, " full mad" suggesting that Vindictive has internally separated Plat's persona from his own; blaming the " mad" portion of his character (Plato) for the death of the Duke and offloading any responsibility he may have felt.

Whilst Vindictive effectively plays two roles in Revenges, Hamlet's philosophical thought would have presented him as someone to be feared by the contemporary audience as he was less predictable (not the typical Elizabethan Revenge hero); Eventide's character in comparison is one-

dimensional, and Vindictive relieving his madness from his character into a physical being; one that the audience could view on stage, would have been statistically less disconcerting than the ambiguous nature of Hamlet's deceit.

Beyond the act of madness that Hamlet displays, he further deceives his onlookers with "Doubling and antithetical phrases" (Frank Corrode) that actively confuse and offset less intelligent characters, allowing him to hide his true meaning. "(Hamlet) For if the sun breeds maggots in a dead dog,] being a good kissing carrion-? have you a daughter? /(Polonium) I have, my lord. (Hamlet) Let her not walk in the sun". The metaphor for the king as "the sun" suggests that Claudius "breeds" corruption, veiling a veiled warning to Polonium to keep Ophelia away from the king. The pun that Hamlet is also advising that Ophelia stay away from him; reinforcing his feigned madness (he is aware that his escalating madness will harm Ophelia, and attempts to distance her). The pun robs both meanings of concrete representation; thus a pun can serve as an ambiguous answer to a direct question, rendering the response devoid of any real information" (Hooper, T), revealing that to Polonium's less intelligent character, the complex meaning behind Hamlet's seemingly deluded statement renders the warning useless; he is unable to permeate the layers of Hamlet's language.

Hamlet's veiled insult to Claudius "A little more than kin, and less than kind" further exposes Hamlet as an intelligent outsider who uses puns purely for the audience's benefit, as the true meaning is lost on characters present on the stage.

The comment “ deflects the authority of Claudia’ claim and exposes Classis’s ulterior motives” (Hooper, T); “ kin” signaling family yet “ kind” suggesting that the moral corruption of Claudia’ character deems him less than human, canceling out the former phrase. It is argued that “ Hamlet himself is a pun, an “ amulet” to counteract Claudia’ poison” (West 75), inflicting deeper meaning on Hamlet’s language through the notion that it holds a part of his fate; he was created to deceive Claudia, acting as a nemesis to avenge his father’s death.

This idea is paradoxical; as Shakespeare wrote Hamlet with the first actor of ‘ Hamlet’; Richard Barrage, in mind, and the similarities between Barrage and Hamlet’s character; namely the recent death of his father and the family business, suggest that it was Burgee’s fate to avenge his father and thus to act as Hamlet, deepening the play with regards to fate and destiny, and cementing that Revenge tragedies feature layers of acting and deceit beyond immediate recognition.

The satirical nature of Eventide’s awareness of being in a play is coupled with the Players of Hamlet; both adding a comedic value to an otherwise melancholic production. “ By nature, the play is double.

.. Because play creates a context in which actions both are real and not real, serious and not serious” (Nard 188). The deep irony initiated through the players exposing the true emotions of characters that rotten to be other than they are progresses the play towards its final catastrophe; setting into action the fate of the court as a whole.

Claudia responds " Give me some light. Away! ", Polonium: " Lights, lights, lights! "; both referring to the physical light of the theatre (in modern productions, this would be an irony in itself; Claudia would be referring to the staging lights of the theatre in which Hamlet is being performed, inadvertently giving stage directions), suggesting that the play-within-a-play has uncovered the secrets of each character, and further, " Give me some light" alludes to the light of God, illuminating Claudia as a character buried deep in sin; the desperation of " Give me" symbolizing a drowning in darkness, to the extent that God is out of reach.

Polonium' " Light, light, light! " exposes his own character as being merely a messenger; when under pressure, his meddling-with-words act falls, revealing him to be of little intelligence, reconstructing others' words and flaunting them as his own. Play makes it akin to the Players in Hamlet.

On several occasions, Vindictive indicates that he is aware of being in a play, inadvertently initiating stage directions similar to that of Claudia upon watching the play; " Mark, thunder! Dost know thy cue, thou big-voiced crier? ' Duke's groans are thunder's watchwords".

Apostrophe and personification of thunder adds comedic effect to the recent murder, indicating that Vindictive is aware of being watched. Theatrical Jargon; " Dost know thy cue" reinforces the paradoxical nature of characters' awareness of being in a play, " thou big-voiced crier" suggesting a mockery of the audience. The doubling line, " When thunder claps, heaven likes the tragedy' is ambiguous, either referring to God, presenting heaven as an omnipresent, omnipotent force much like in a theatre, or alternatively "

claps" signaling the audience, involving onlookers in the play to the extent that they themselves are characters.

With a "willing suspension of disbelief" (S.

T. Coleridge), audience members can become the equivalent of Hamlet's characters watching the play, where the play is *Revenge*, to the extent that it is possible to forget that they are in the audience. To conclude, acting and deceit play a significant role in the creation of *Revenge* tragedies; the complex structure roles and relationships formed in doing so revealing the subconscious intentions of each deceitful character, and progressing each play towards its inevitable fate.

The liberal use of asides, however, allowing the audience to sense the dramatic irony of the deceit, creates a comedic effect that, whilst lightening the atmosphere of an otherwise tragic and melancholy play, for "If the quality of humor is important to comedy, it is more so in tragedy, whether in life or theatre" (Sir Herbert Tree), also allowed the contemporary audience to enjoy themselves in a time of religious instability and oppressive rule.