

The ideas and themes indicated in the first three scenes of hamlet that you find ...



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The first three scenes of Hamlet, gives you an extremely dramatic and interesting insight into most of the themes continued throughout the play.

Shakespeare manages to create the suspense and drama necessary to keep the audience enthralled and expectant. He does this through the use of imagery, mystery and language, some unusual, unifying themes, and memorable relationships. The relationship between Hamlet and Horatio is particularly provocative, and is often overlooked by those studying Hamlet in depth. Shakespeare cleverly devised the character of Horatio to portray the true character of Hamlet. Horatio acts as an antithesis to Hamlet, enhancing his distinctive characteristics.

As a fellow student of Wittenberg University, he is Hamlet's intellectual, and to a certain extent social equal. Hamlet therefore, values the loyal friendship they share, and confides in Horatio, thus revealing glimpses of the former prince. Hamlet also regards Horatio's moral integrity and fortitude with great admiration. Horatio, being understanding and sympathetic to Hamlet's situation, does therefore not perceive Hamlet's melancholy behaviour as being intolerable or, " unmanly" and, " unschooled". This emphasises the mutual friendship they entrust to each other. Through the rational conversations held between the two friends, the audience is able to identify the melancholy Hamlet is suffering is genuine rather than a state of madness.

Through Horatio many truths are revealed about the young prince and what is to come in later in the play. The same rational line of thinking is also evident in the character of Horatio. He is perceptive enough to realise the

Ghost's appearance spells disaster for Denmark," A mote it is trouble the mind's eye." Almost immediately after the visitation from the Ghost, Horatio decides it would be in everyone's interest to, "

.. impart what (they) have seen tonight Unto young Hamlet;" thus confirming the friendship even further. Horatio shows Hamlet a respect and compassion no other character yields to. Hamlet is blatantly in the minority by mourning for his father.

Other courtiers have swiftly moved on from their 'grief' stricken period, and engaged in the celebrations of the incestuous marriage of Claudius and Gertrude. This enrages and furies the young prince who is still in a deep state of mourning. The asinine courtiers, desperate to please their new king, Claudius, readily allow their mournful state to be taken over by that of celebration and 'joy'. Horatio and Hamlet share the belief that the wedding followed too soon on from the funeral," Indeed my Lord it followed hard upon" This binds their relationship further, due to the fact they hold something in common against the rest of the land.

The fact Horatio refers to Hamlet as," My dear Lord" suggests a deep respect for the prince who has endured so much over the past few months. In turn Hamlet is genuinely pleased to see an old friend and ally, " Sir, my good friend, I'll change that name with you...

I am very glad to see you" In fact when his close friends surround Hamlet, his mood positively changes to that of an excited and relieved man, " For God's love let me hear." This ardent comment expresses his excitement at

the fact Horatio, Marcellus and Barnardo saw the Ghost of his deceased  
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father. It is through Horatio that the audience is able to see the characteristics of the former prince. Shakespeare cunningly used the character of Horatio to emphasise the dramatic mood swings experienced by Hamlet. He sways from the mourning, tragic prince to an animated and flurried young man.

All this is highlighted through Horatio; Hamlet's friend, fellow student and mentor. Another interesting aspect to Hamlet is the type of language Shakespeare uses to convey certain emotions and moods. There is the fairly unusual opening scene, which conveys a fraught and tense mood. This is portrayed through a rich tapestry of words, similes and metaphors. However, it is the use of cliches that really develops another dimension to the play.

Their contradictory meanings all help convey the sense of confusion and mystery the audience is exposed to, and what Hamlet is all about.

Shakespeare carefully manipulates his language to not only create mood and atmosphere, but to also reflect certain social aspects of seventeenth century England. This is evident in most of the male speeches, especially when directed at women. The character of Polonius has been carefully devised to reinforce the hierarchical authority familiar with fathers during the greater part of History.

This can be clearly seen in his conversations with his son, Laertes and his daughter, Ophelia. These speeches are often riddled with cliches, making them sound more insincere than honest, and sometimes even ending in a contradiction, as in Polonius' lecture to Laertes, " Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.... Neither a borrower or a lender be.

.. This above all, to thine own self be true..

..” The advice parted by Polonius, appears to be sound philosophy on how one ought to live, but looking deeper, and beyond the initial meaning, you see that there is little depth and sincerity in his words, resulting in a string of cliches. Polonius tells Laertes what he should be doing, “ Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice; Take each man’s censure, but reserve thy judgement.” Yet ends in the contradictory line “...

to thine own self be true.” This speech asserts parental power, and subtle manipulation from father to son, reflecting the stereotypical relationship between parent and child. Polonius’ advice seems to be rather simplistic and flat, and it would be hard to apply it practically to every day life. He simplifies life itself, not taking into consideration affecting circumstances.

These words from Polonius to Ophelia obviously have the desired effect, seeing as Ophelia pacifies herself to an even greater extent,” I do not know my Lord what I should think.” And refers to her father as,”...

my Lord...” Polonius is not the only character in the first three scenes who articulates in cliches.

Polonius’ son, Laertes, similarly lectures Ophelia on love and life, asserting male dominance and authority. There is a strong sense portrayed by Shakespeare’s use of language, that Laertes has difficulties expressing himself, due to the fact he is so wrapped up in a male dominated society thus leading to the excessive use of cliches and platitudes. Ophelia promises, “...as a watchman to (her) heart.

..”” ...

the effect of this good lesson keep...” even though Laertes words’ discourage her from her relationship with Hamlet, due to the fact, “ he himself is subject to his birth.

” As one critic describes, “ Ophelia is deprived of her own voice for most of the play, and it is only when she goes mad she can say what she thinks.” The use of cliches sustains the running abstraction of male authority and dominance. In Polonius’ lectures to his children, the cliches are representative of the fact he is a very good courtier. In the court he rarely has to think or be true to himself, his actions in the court are what he (thinks) should be doing to achieve the Kings respect. However, one may look at the use of cliches form another angle. The play Hamlet is incredibly well known, and many of the main speeches are often recited, resulting in some of them sounding cliched.

The play Hamlet is full of rich and thought provoking imagery. There are two main continuing metaphors, which emerge throughout the scenes, thus keeping the audience remembering past events, and the emotions the character has felt and is feeling. The imagery also exaggerates major themes, and keeps the underlying mood of the scene fresh in the minds of the audience. The two most obvious and interesting themes are the continual references to death and disease, and growth and nature.

In Hamlet’s opening soliloquy, he describes the moral condition of Denmark under his uncle Claudius’ rule “...as an unweeded gardenThat grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature.

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..” This metaphor has a parallel to the ruinous Garden of Eden. Hamlet is not the only one to refer to the ‘ nature’ theme.

In Claudius’ opening speech to his courtiers, he summons them to keep “ The memory...” of King Hamlet “..

. green...

“. Hamlet also uses this imagery to try and convey the sincerity of his grief to his mother and step-father, “ Nor the windy suspiration of forced breath, No, nor the fruitful river in the eye...” The continuous metaphor relating to death and disease is particularly interesting; due to the fact it keeps the message and the mood of the play vivid in the audience’s minds.

Death becomes an obsession for the young prince, who frequently contemplates, “...self slaughter” only stopping himself due to the fact he cannot see how it would be morally ok, especially seeing as, “.

.. the Everlasting...

” has, “...fixedHis canon ‘ gainst...

” it. The imagery of disease seems to connect, and bring Hamlet together. This theme seems to refer to the state of the nation as a whole, and even characters describe themselves as feeling, “...sick at heart”.

The metaphor of death really emphasises the mood and tension felt in certain scenes. Horatio cunningly builds up suspicion and apprehension by using metaphors such as,“...

Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse." The first few scenes really convey the feeling of dread and trepidation surrounding King Claudius and his intentions. Denmark is often referred to as one physical unit, a diseased nation, made ill by a corrupt ruler and the loss of an honest one, causing the,"..

. state to be disjoint and out of frame." The theme of disease and death often show through soliloquies to really express the mood of the character. This is especially true of Hamlet, who in his first soliloquy refers to the world as, "rank and gross" giving the strong impression he is depressed, enforcing what we had already assumed. The character of Laertes has also been devised to bring in the theme of diseases and death. In his speech to Ophelia, he takes the image of disease one step further by describing it as having its' effect from the inside out," The canker galls the infants of the spring Too oft before their buttons be disclosed.

.. " This is a complicated metaphor, but with a deep and significant meaning. The "canker" is a worm and to "gall" is to break the skin.

"Infants of the spring" is a metaphor for young spring flowers with their unopened buds being the "buttons". Laertes sees Ophelia as the young bud, full of innocence, and her love for Hamlet being the canker. Due to the fact the two lovers cannot marry, there is no doubt Hamlet will eventually break her heart. She would therefore be like the flower, being eaten by the canker, hollowing out her heart. If Ophelia were to sleep with Hamlet, her reputation would be destroyed, and the canker breaking the surface from the inside



would represent this. There are many other themes, all significant in their own way such as incest, desire etc.

These are evident in Hamlet's soliloquy, when he reminisces the love and adoration his parent showed for each other," Why she would hang on himAs if increase of appetite had grownBy what it fed on..." It is Shakespeare's ability to draw on unique and interesting metaphors, which also have the power to connect and bring together ideas and emotions, which makes Hamlet such a wonderful and studied play.

The first three scenes have been marvellously constructed to allow the rich undertones of moods and events to seep through. Emotions and events are kept warm in the minds of the audience through the use of exciting imagery. The unusual use of language (i. e. cliches) gives the characters another (and more often than not colder) dimension, where manipulation and false identity seem to be rife.

Shakespeare really manages to grasp the attention of the audience from the very beginning, sustaining interest throughout the first three scenes. Varied characters and the relationships between them also help create a sense of drama, all of which help make the play Hamlet famous.