

Hamlet essay: deception

Literature, British Literature



Shakespeare's Hamlet: Bomb Makers who gets Blown Sky High by their own Weapons Lies and deception are some of the many actions that have disastrous consequences. For the most part, they destroy trust and leave the people closest to us feeling vulnerable. In Hamlet, one of Shakespeare's many plays, the theme of lies and deception is very significant. This play shows that every character that lies and practices the act of deception is ultimately punished for doing so by their treacherous deaths. Hamlet has lied and practiced deception several times which has prolonged his primary goal and also causes his death.

Additionally, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's unskilled acts of dishonesty and disloyalty towards Hamlet have all backfired; as a result, this is the cause of their ironic deaths. Furthermore, Polonius' selfish act of using others to his own advantage has all polished the table for his treacherous death. In this play, characters who manipulate the act of lie and deception eventually end up facing their own death. Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark and the protagonist of the play, performs many deceptive acts that all leads up to his death.

After he has conferred with the ghost who claims to be his father's spirit, old King Hamlet, he is shocked when he finds out the truth about his tragic death. In response, he pretends to be insane. He feigns his insanity to distract his mother, Gertrude, his uncle and step father, King Claudius and their attendants from his true intentions of gathering information to eventually expose Claudius for the murder of his father. It is evident that he is pretending to be crazy because he mentions it several times to his friends.

He explains to them in Act 1, Scene 5 that he will “ put an antic disposition on” (191).

The word ‘ antic’ means ‘ clown’ or an actor who plays a comic role and requires absurdly ridiculous behavior. In other words, he will pretend to be a madman in order to achieve his goal. Additionally, for the purpose of love, Hamlet lies to Ophelia about his love for her during one of their conversations in Act 3, Scene 1. Hamlet: I did love you once. Ophelia: Indeed my lord, you made me believe so. Hamlet: You should not have believ’d me, for virtue cannot so Inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I lov’d you not. Ophelia: I was the more deceiv’d (123-129).

In this heartbreaking scene, we cannot truly say how much of Hamlet’s words are true and how much of an act he has put on. This is because he seems to know that Ophelia will report his behavior to her father, Polonius, who will then disclose the report to King Claudius. However, we can see through his corruptive and deceptive act because he denies that he has ever loved Ophelia right after claiming that he has loved her once. One could then argue that Hamlet is purposely pretending to be an insane lover.

Furthermore, in Act 3 Scene 2, Hamlet organizes and directs a delusive play called “ The Mousetrap” before the royal audience.

The play itself is an elaborated deception because Hamlet tries to determine Claudius’ guilt through it. The play depicts the murder of Duke Gonzago in Vienna by the antagonist Lucianus, thus mirroring Claudius’ assassination of old King Hamlet. Like Claudius, Lucianus, the player pours poison in Gonzago’s ears and soon after marries his wife, Baptista. Hamlet is

convinced of his uncle's guilt when Claudius gets agitated and rises from his seat. Shortly after, he orders his attendants to "[Bring him] some light" (3. 2. 261). This play has prolonged Hamlet's goal of avenging his father's death.

If Hamlet has believed the ghost during their first encounter and has avenged his father's death earlier, Hamlet could have had a prosperous life ahead of him. However, unfortunately, he chooses to slowly analyze the truth before taking any reckless actions; therefore, this causes him to lose his life at the end of the play. In relation to Carl Jung's Archetypal Theory, Hamlet is not merely a hero; he is a tragic hero who has died in vain while accomplishing his goal of avenging his father's death. He is a hero who makes sure his story would be known that he has conquered the ambitious Claudius.

However, in the process, he lost everyone he loves including his own life. Hamlet is in fact a tragic hero. According to Aristotle's definition of tragedy, a tragic hero is a great person who has the potential for greatness but is defeated. This protagonist must come into conflict with a force who or which directly opposes to what he should want. He must also suffer from a tragic flaw, which inevitably brings about his own downfall. In Hamlet, Hamlet is the protagonist who suffers from the flaw of inaction while he is faced against Claudius.

To conclude, because of Hamlet's great inability to act earlier, his lies and deceptive acts have all prolonged his primary goal which has resulted in his tragic death. Hamlet's childhood friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern both try to deceive Hamlet. However, their unskilled uses of dishonesty and

disloyalty have resulted in their ironic death. They are introduced in the beginning of Act 2, Scene 2 as Hamlet's childhood friends who are sent for by King Claudius for their services. When they first meet Hamlet and are asked the reason for their arrival, they answer: "To visit you, my lord, no other occasion" (2. 2. 8). However, Hamlet has already seen through their attempted act of trying to fool him and then replies: "You were sent/for, and there is a kind of confession in your looks, which/ you modesties have not craft enough colour. I know the/good King and Queen have sent for you" (2. 2. 285-288). Through this reply, it is evident that Hamlet has the ability to see through someone's deceptive act because he knows that they would not have come to Denmark without a reason. He also alludes that they must have done something wrong to be punished by Fortune since they are here in the Denmark which he considers to be prison.

Additionally, Guildenstern again tries to get information about Hamlet's disorder after the play, 'The Mousetrap'. When Rosencrantz approaches Hamlet to talk about his "distemper" and that he should "[tell his] griefs to [his] friend", Hamlet furiously replies: Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me. You would play upon me, you would seem to know my stops, you would pluck out the heart of my mystery you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass; and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot make it speak.

Why, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me (3. 2. 325, 349-357). Their attempt to get Hamlet to confide in them has failed and

as a result, Hamlet makes an analogy between playing a musical instrument and deception to demonstrate why his friends cannot “play” on him. This is because they are simply not skilled enough. Furthermore, when Hamlet finds out about the command letter that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are carrying to the King of

England instructing to have him killed, he steals the letter and rewrites it to command the death of “the bearers of this note,” which is Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Then, without remorse, puts the note back in their possession. They brought upon themselves their ironic deaths because of their failure of being honest and loyal towards their friend Hamlet. In relation to Jung’s Archetypal Theory, both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are the shape shifters in the play Hamlet. A shape shifter is a type of character whose identity or allegiance changes and is often unclear.

Their personality has changed from loyal childhood friends to deceptive and backstabbing snakes. They have changed sides over the course of their friendship with Hamlet because they are looking to put themselves in a good position with King Claudius and are hoping for “a king’s remembrance” or reward from him in exchange for their services as he has promised in Act 2, Scene 2. In conclusion, their ironic deaths are the price they pay for being dishonest and disloyal towards a good friend. Another character that uses deceit often as a means of investigation is Polonius. These acts of personal conduct have resulted in his death.

Upon Laertes’ departure to France, Polonius deceives his own son when he sends Reynaldo after him. In Act 2 Scene 1, Polonius tells Reynaldo: Marry,

...sir, here's my drift, And I believe it is a fetch of warrant. You laying these slight sullies on my son, As'twere a thing a little soiled I'th'working, Mark you, Your party is converse, him you would sound, Having ever seen in the prenominate crimes The youth you breathe of guilty, be assured He closes with you in this consequence ' Good sir,' or so, or ' friend,' or ' gentleman,' According to the phrase or the addition Of man and country (43-54).

Here, hoping that deception may be the best way to find out the truth, Polonius orders his servant Reynaldo to spread rumours about his son and to pretend to know Laertes so that he can find out the truth about his son's whereabouts from his friends. He is also hoping that Laertes will, in due time, open up to Reynaldo about his secrets and Reynaldo can then report back to Polonius. Furthermore, Polonius deceives his daughter, Ophelia by using her love for Hamlet for the King's benefit. King Claudius, in the presence of Polonius, says: For we have closely sent for Hamlet hither

That he, as'twere by accident, may here Affront Ophelia. Her father and myself, lawful espials, Will so bestow ourselves that, seeing unseen, We may of their encounter frankly judge, And gather by him, as he is behaved, If't be th'addiction of his love or not That thus he suffers for (3. 1. 33-41). Here, both King Claudius and Polonius are planning to use Ophelia and her love to determine whether Hamlet's behavior is the result of the affliction of his love for Ophelia. Also, from this scene, we can see that Polonius does not care for his daughter because he has agreed to use her in order to get closer to Claudius.

To him, she is like a mere pawn in a chess game that is only used to protect the king, Polonius. In connection to the Jungian Literary Theory, Polonius represents a shadowed character in the play. The ‘shadow’ is the psychic space in a person’s mind where they store their darker impulses in addition to unpleasant thoughts and memories. In Polonius’ case, these two examples show his darker side as someone who would spy on his own son and use his daughter’s love for the man she loves to his own advantages. Moreover, Polonius is the representation of a failed mentor.

A mentor is defined as someone, usually older and more experienced, who advises and leads a younger, less experienced person into the right path. As a father, he gives outstanding advices to Laertes. For example, in Act 1, Scene 3, before Laertes’ departure, Polonius explains to him about how he should behave with honor and uprightness. He also admonishes his son to be sociable but not necessarily friendly with everyone. However, along with many other advices from lines 63 through lines 84, Polonius himself does not act in accordance to his own words, hence the phrase, failed mentor. Instead, he usually uses others such as Reynaldo and Ophelia to spy and pry on other people’s business. This kind of behavior is not upright and definitely not honorable. In the end, he is ultimately punished and pays for his exploitive actions by the means of his own death. Throughout this play, it is evident that lying and deceiving others usually have disastrous endings.

Shakespeare tries to show his readers that the lies and deception that Hamlet performs towards his parents and his lover as a result of his inability to act sooner has resulted in his tragic death.

He also shows how one's unskillful use of dishonesty and disloyalty can lead to death. Lastly, he shows that deceiving others for one's own benefits is not at all beneficial as it can also end one's life. Overall, the theme of deception is prevalent in Shakespeare's Hamlet, and many characters use this act. However, it is evident that deception is not the path someone should take in order to complete a goal. It goes without saying that our actions could create unintended consequences in our lives. That consequence may be one's death which can cease someone's life and everything in it.