

Shakespeare's hamlet literary analysis

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In Hamlet, the tragedy by William Shakespeare, Hamlet, the prince of Denmark withholds a great internal conflict throughout the play. As a result, Hamlet contradicts himself many times throughout out the play, which caused the unnecessary death of many others. As well as trying to be true to himself, Hamlet is an expert at acting out roles and making people falsely believe him. The roles he plays are ones in which he fakes madness to accomplish his goals. While one second Hamlet pretends to be under a strange spell of madness, seconds later he may become perfectly calm. He struggles with the issue of avenging his father s death.

He vows to kill Claudius but then backs out several times. Hamlet s actions throughout the play support this deceitful nature. His dual personalities are the foundation of his madness. There are many examples that illustrate how Hamlet s deceitful nature results in a tragedy because of his inability to choose which role to play.

In Act One, Hamlet appears to be very straightforward in his actions and his role. When his mother questions him, Hamlet says, “ Seems, madam? Nay it is. I know not seems” (1. 2. 76). By saying this, Hamlet lets Gertrude know that he is what she sees, torn over his father s death.

Later, he makes a clear statement about his state of mind when he commits himself to revenge. “ I ll wipe away all trivial fond records, all saws of books, all forms, all pressures past, that youth and observation copied there, and thy commandment all alone shall live within the book and volume of my brain” (1. 5. 100-104). In that statement, Hamlet is declaring that he will be committed to nothing else but the revenge of his fathers death. There is no

confusion about Hamlet's character in Act One. He has said earlier that he is what he appears to be, and there is no reason to doubt it.

In the next act, Hamlet's intentions suddenly become confusing. In the first act, Hamlet was dedicated and inspired in seeking revenge. However, when Hamlet appears again in the second act, he loses the conviction that was present earlier. He has yet to take up the orders assigned to him by the ghost. He spends the act walking around, reading, and talking with Polonius, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and the players. It is not until the very end of the act that he even mentions revenge. These two acts show Hamlet's insincerity and how tragedy results. With certain people, Hamlet is resolved to get revenge for his father's death.

With other people, this thought is the last thought in his mind. If he had any of the resolve he had showed earlier, his act of revenge would have already been completed. Instead of playing the part of the vengeful son, or dropping the issue entirely, he spends the entire act slacking off. He avoids the decision he has to make and pretends to be mad. This is shown when he says to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, "I know not-lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises" (2. 2. 280-281). Later Hamlet tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that he is just faking his madness when he says, "I am but mad north-north-west.

When the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw" (2. 2. 347-348).

By Hamlet admitting that he is faking, he is truly saying that he is comfortable with it. It is strange that Hamlet is comfortable with playing at this point, but the main concept is that he is not acting out the role that he

established in act one. However, when the players come around, the resolved Hamlet returns. Hamlet is prompted to vengeance again by the moving speech that is given by one of the players. In this speech, he says, “What s Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, that he should weep for her? What would he do had he motive and cue for passion that I have” (2. . 513-516).

In the praise of this player s ability to act, Hamlet says that if this was a play he acted in, he would have killed Claudius by now. He is then moved to swear that he should kill Claudius when he says, “ I should ha fatted all the region kites with this slave s offal. Bloody, bawdy villain! O, vengeance! Why, what an ass am I” (2. 2. 533-537). Act 2, scene 2 is a great example of Hamlet s tremendous problem. Hamlet makes this big buildup of what he should have done and how he will seek revenge, but then contradicts himself in his next statement. After all of the swearing and support, he backs out again.

He can t decide whether to play the role or not. Being caught in the middle, Hamlet decides that he needs more proof of the King s guilt. He keeps going back on his resolve when he says, “ The play s the thing wherein I ll catch the conscience of the King” (2. 2. 559-560). Hamlet believes that acting will transform one s inner self to match the exterior. Hamlet s belief is backed up by the play. In the play, it is true that acting can transform one s inner self into whatever role one is playing. This is proved when Claudius s inner self is shown during the play, due to the one of the players acting his part out.

Hamlet says if he would only act the part, he wouldn t have a problem taking action. However, the repeated contradictions in Hamlet are shown again

when he says, “ God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another” (3. 1. 139-140). He is bouncing back and forth between supporting acting and denouncing it. Whenever he is in support of acting he is also ready for revenge. In the next scene the conflicting action is similar, but less obvious. When Hamlet is advising the player on how his lines should be read he says, “ Suit the action to the word, the word to the action” (3. 2. 15).

If Hamlet would follow his own advice he would not have a conflict. This shows that he is not consistent within himself. Hamlet is saying one should not distinguish between word and deeds, even though he does himself. Also when Hamlet speaks with Horatio, he praises him for being rational and having a consistent character. He praises Horatio for being true to himself, and not being an actor. Hamlet says “ Give me that man that is not passion s slave, and I will wear him in my heart s core, ay, in my heart of heart, as I do thee” (3. 2. 61-64). Hamlet is saying this because he wants Horatio to watch the King at the play.

He is unsure of his uncle s guilt, and he wants proof. He wants it from someone who he thinks is honest throughout. Therefore, Hamlet says to Horatio, “ Observe my uncle. If his occulted guilt do not itself unkennel in one speech, it is a damned ghost we have seen” (3. 2. 70-72). Proof does not have anything to do with the role that Hamlet is supposed to play. Hamlet just wants his uncle to be judged by how he acts during the play. If the King is a good actor, and does not show his guilt, he will most likely not be killed. Whichever role Claudius decides to play is the role, in turn, Hamlet decides to play.

Unfortunately for Claudius, he is not a good actor and when he rises Hamlet responds with, “ What, frightened with false fire” (3. 2. 243). Hamlet is saying it is only a play, it is not real. This new proof drives Hamlet to use more words. Later, Hamlet again talks himself out of character and does not kill the King. He puts it off until later and says: When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage, or in th incestuous pleasure of his bed, at gaming, a-swearing, or about some act that has no relish of salvation in t-then trip him that his heels may kick at heaven, and that his soul may be as dammed and black (3. . 89-94).

Hamlet is waiting until Claudius fits the part of a villain. His action is paralyzed whenever something does not fit the part. For Hamlet, everything needs to be perfect in order for him to carry out his actions. He needs his revenge to be dramatic so that he may get into it and finally play it out. After Hamlet backs out of killing Claudius, Hamlet says to his mother, “ O shame, where is thy blush”(3. 4. 82). He is voicing his distaste for Gertrude not only for marrying his uncle but also for not being true to herself. She should show some shame for her sins but she does not.

Hamlet is contradicting himself once again. He has been two sided and untrue for the majority of the play. At this point he is still not sure as how to proceed. Hamlet is caught in the middle of acting. Hamlet finally gets his act together, and decides to act the part his father had given him, when he sees the soldiers going off to war to die. The imminent death of twenty thousand men that for a fantasy and trick of fame go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot whereon the numbers cannot try the cause, which is not tomb enough and continent to hide the slain?

O, from this time forth my thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth (4. 4. 61-67). Those soldiers fight and die for an insignificant plot of land, and they do it because they are soldiers, for no other reason. This convinces Hamlet to follow through and do his duty. Hamlet realizes that he should do what his role dictates strictly because it is his role. He does not hesitate and fully embraces the act. In reaction to Ophelia's death, he is again behaving as he should have. She was his love and he should have loved her more than her brother. This is shown when Hamlet says, " I loved Ophelia.

Forty thousand brothers could not with their quantity of love make up my sum" (5. 1. 243-245). Hamlet should have loved her, but he did not. Had he loved her he would not have treated her so poorly earlier. He is now committed to acting, and loving Ophelia fits the role. In the rest of the play Hamlet sticks to his resolve. He barely has time to tell his story of escape to Horatio before he is challenged. He does not refuse the challenge because as nobility, he cannot refuse he has to keep his honor. Hamlet goes to the match and because he has now accepted the role, he does not hesitate to kill the King when prompted to do so.

Throughout the whole play, Hamlet wrestles with an inner conflict that ultimately costs not only Claudius life, but also many others, including his own. He even feels that playing one role can transform his inner feelings as well. While one moment Hamlet is committed to revenge, the next moment he is not sure if Claudius was the killer. In one scene Hamlet praises acting and realizes his role, but in the next he decides to put off his deeds. If Hamlet had followed through with his actions, and had not debated so often,

there would have been fewer deaths. Hamlet's inability to act lead to everyone's demise.