

Thematic exploration of deceit in hamlet: analytical essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Hamlet's life is centered around deception. Not only is he frequently the victim of deception from others, but he himself is also deceptive. Mostly everything he believes is false, and most of his manipulation is with the intent to help himself rather than hurt others. Deception is a major theme in Hamlet; he always uses it to get his way. With deception as a central theme, it is proving that truth can always be manipulated for the benefit of the manipulator and in order for them to reach the truth they are seeking.

One way that Hamlet is deceptive in the play for his own benefit is when he fakes madness; he does this to cover up suspicious activities he is partaking in to prove his father was killed by his uncle Claudius. He tells this directly to his friend, who is also the man he idolizes, Horatio, ' How strange or odd soe'er I bear myself, / As I, perchance, hereafter shall think meet / To put an antic disposition on, / That you, at such times seeing me, never shall, / With arms encumber'd thus, or this head-shake, / Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase, / As ' Well, well, we know'; or ' We could, an if we would'; / Or ' If we list to speak'; or ' There be, an if they might'; / Or such ambiguous giving out, to note / That you know aught of me: this is not to do, / So grace and mercy at your most need help you'. Hamlet's ' antic disposition' is used mainly whenever he talks to anyone he knows is close to Claudius, such as this line he speaks to Polonius, " For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion – Have you a daughter' Whenever he is around an acquaintance of Claudius, his words turn into gibberish, and nothing he says makes sense. Why would he be asking Polonius if he has a daughter? Hamlet knows Ophelia and loves Ophelia...or at least pretends to – another act of deception, in fact. Not only is Hamlet deceptive to those surrounding

Claudius, he is also deceptive directly to Claudius. Again, he speaks to Horatio on the matter, saying, ‘ Give him a heedful note / For I mine eyes will rivet to his face, / And after we will both our judgments join / In censure of his seeming’. Hamlet’s intent in this specific scene is to uncover that Claudius is in fact his father’s killer by staging a play within the play, called The Murder of Gonzago, which contains scenes very similar to what he believes happened, what the ghost of his father told him. He wants Claudius to react in a way that reveals he is the murderer of his father, which is again using deception for his own benefit. He is also trying to deceive his mother Gertrude with The Murder of Gonzago – his intent with her is to show that she is in the wrong for her marrying Claudius so soon after the death of King Hamlet by portraying his own character as performing similar behaviors.

Putting on The Murder of Gonzago is another way in which Hamlet is deceptive to the others around him for his own gain, and The Murder of Gonzago itself carries the theme that deception can sometimes be a necessity for gaining the truth. Hamlet’s deception affects more than just him, however. Because of the way Hamlet behaves to get his way, his so-called ‘ antic disposition,’ Ophelia actually goes insane and kills herself. Claudius states that Ophelia is “ divided from herself and her fair judgment” because of Hamlet’s behavior. However, Ophelia herself is also deceptive; she hides her father Polonius’s manipulative behaviors from Hamlet. In the act of trying to uncover the truth regarding whether or not King Hamlet was truly killed by Claudius or if the devil sent the ghost, Hamlet feigns insanity in order to gain information about his father’s death, and as a result, causes

many more deaths. One of these deaths is Polonius, the father of Ophelia; in fact, Ophelia's madness is partially caused by the accidental murder of Polonius by Hamlet. 'How now? A rat? Dead, for a ducat, dead' is what Hamlet says when he accidentally kills Polonius. He believes Polonius is Claudius, but Claudius has predicted this would happen and sent Polonius in his place to deceive Hamlet. Claudius is another character who uses deception to get his way; in this case, he uses it to prevent his own death, which causes a world of trouble in Hamlet. Hamlet using deception to gain truths he otherwise would not know is ironic, as he is set up from the first scene that he appears in as a character who values real truths, telling Gertrude, 'Seems,' madam? Nay it is. I know not 'seems.' / 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother, / Nor customary suits of solemn black, / Nor windy suspiration of forced breath, / No, nor the fruitful river in the eye, / Nor the dejected havior of the visage, / Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief, / That can denote me truly. These indeed 'seem,' / For they are actions that a man might play: / But I have that within which passes show, / These but the trappings and the suits of woe. He is telling her that despite his outward appearance, though it indicates he is grieving King Hamlet, no one can truly tell what he is feeling, because what he is feeling is all internal and his internal feelings are much more intense than his external appearance denotes, and that his mother, Claudius, and the court are all fake because all they truly care about appearance.

Despite all of this, Hamlet is also disingenuous throughout the play and uses his outer appearance to define himself – this deception is to gain the truths

about his father's death that he desires. Because of the way Hamlet and the other characters in the play behave, using deception for their own gain, at the end of the play, everyone important in Denmark is dead. Hamlet is not only frequently deceptive to his own acquaintances and family, but they are also incredibly deceptive to him. Hamlet's deception is for his own gain, as is the deception of others for their own gain, which is most likely why it hurts so many more people rather than helping them.