

Importance of minor characters in shakespeare

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In the main plot of Shakespeare's famous play Hamlet, Hamlet's father, the king, is murdered, and as a result, Hamlet swears revenge and ultimately succumbs to madness. Hamlet plays the role of the protagonist, while his uncle, Claudius, serves as the antagonist of the story. Besides the two main characters, there are a number of secondary characters, of unusual importance both to the action and to the themes of the play.

Many of the themes of the play, including decay and corruption, revenge, and appearance vs.

reality, are outlined through the description and progression of the secondary characters. Shakespeare creates minor characters Ophelia, the ghost and Polonius to play a very crucial role in Hamlet as they shape the thematic elements of the play. The character of Ophelia plays the role of Hamlet's love interest and is easily manipulated by her family; portraying various themes of the play through her actions and behaviour. At the onset of the play Ophelia appears to have her wits about her, with the ability to be objective and coherent when she recognizes the mad behaviour of Hamlet.

In act 3 scene 1 during a contentious conversation between Ophelia and Hamlet, he expresses his disgust with Ophelia and women in general, insisting that "it hath made me mad". Ophelia is able to identify the frantic behaviour of Hamlet proclaiming "oh what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!" Although Ophelia is of sound mind during this portion of the play, she quickly spirals out of control, losing her mind as a result of the murder of her father.

Ophelia's insanity is witnessed during act 4 scene 5 when she proceeds to sing everything she says " How can you tell the difference between you true lover and some other? Ophelia's madness is also described by Horatio when he tells the queen " she is importunate, indeed distract... says she hears there's tricks I' th' world, and hems, and beats her heart, spurns enviously at straws, speaks things in doubt that carry but hald sense". The tragic downfall of Ophelia depicted in the play illustrates the theme of decay and corruption. The ghost of Hamlets dead father, King Hamlet, drives Hamlets determination to avenge his father, setting the revenge plot into motion, a major theme in the play.

Upon Hamlet and the ghost's first meeting, he informs Hamlet of his father's horrible murder by Claudius, encouraging him to avenge the king " revenge his foul and most unnatural murder". Before even explaining to Hamlet the details of the murder Hamlet insists " haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift as meditation or the thoughts of love, may sweep my revenge", driving the action of the play forward and initiating the theme. Although Hamlet swears to get revenge quickly his procrastination and uncertainty prevents him from achieving his goal.

When Hamlet begins to veer away from his attempt to kill Claudius, obsessing over his mother's behaviour, the ghost returns to remind him of his true purpose " do not forget. This visitation is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose". The ghost is a constant reminder throughout the play of the theme of revenge, encouraging Hamlet to avenge his father. At the beginning of Hamlet, Polonius is introduced as the father of Laertes and Ophelia and is later revealed to illustrate the theme of appearance vs.

reality. Polonius' has the appearance of a well natured wise old man yet in reality he is a poor excuse for a man who's obsessed with self gain.

Polonius enjoys giving advice, including " this above all: to thine ownself be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man", insisting that if you are true to yourself, you cannot deceive anyone else. In reality, Polonius is in no position to be preaching about honesty and truthfulness, due to his shady behaviour spying on his children and Hamlet. Polonius presents himself as a very caring father, concerned about his children; however, in an attempt to keep an eye on his son, Laertes, he does not consider the possible repercussions of his plan.

Polonius instructs his servant to spread rumors about his son, in the hopes of possibly discovering Laertes's true behavior, disregarding Reynaldo's protest that " that would dishonour him! " Due to his constant use of subterfuge, the character Polonius is one of the play's best examples of the major theme of appearance vs. reality. It is uncommon in pieces of literature for secondary characters to be of such importance, both to the action and to the themes, as they are in Hamlet.

The themes of the play, including decay and corruption, revenge, and appearance vs. reality, are highlighted through the description and progression of the secondary characters. Shakespeare creates minor characters Ophelia, the ghost and Polonius with the intention for them to play a very crucial role in Hamlet; shaping the thematic elements of the play. Secondary characters are often used in a play to supplement the main characters and the story line; however Shakespeare creates them with a much greater importance to reveal the themes of the play.