

Appearance vs. reality 2

Literature, British Literature



In Hamlet, by William Shakespeare, there are a wide array of themes. The most important being that of appearance vs. reality. This theme is consistent throughout the play, and spawns the other themes. It also incorporates all the major motifs in the play. The theme is strengthened by the use of symbolism and enables the reader to predict future events in the play. Without the theme of appearance versus reality, the play would lack plot, action, and intrigue, causing readers to lose interest. The major motif of madness in "Hamlet" is created by the theme of appearance vs. reality. Hamlet's fabricated madness is the cause of a major part of the action in the play. Of course, none would be possible if it had not been for Hamlet's decision to act as he did. In other words, he essentially pretends he is insane so that he can accomplish what he feels needs to be done. The first example of appearance vs. reality is seen in King Claudius, who is not a righteous king at all. He is the one who killed king Hamlet, but that is not the appearance that he attempts to portray. This is made known to Hamlet as the ghost tells him, "A serpent stung me...the serpent that did sting thy father's life, now wears the crown." The ghost reveals to Hamlet that he is the ghost of his father, and this is when Hamlet decides to plan out his revenge by acting as if he is insane. "How strange or odd some'er I bear myself (As I perchance hereafter shall think meet to put an antic disposition on," (Act 1 scene 5). Clearly the theme of appearance vs. reality can be seen here which proves that the major action is carried out through this theme. Without it, the play would be as any other story in the sense that the protagonist takes quick, immediate action. Rather, Hamlet, who is considered by many to be a great character, is a character that is intellectual while able to maintain a feigned

madness. In fact, other criticisms question whether Hamlet was actually mad or not. Such contentions were built on observations by an anonymous author who stated Hamlet may be mad because " he has a lot of stress, has to deal with his mother's adultery, his father's murder, " He follows by demonstrating why Hamlet is not mad: " tells his mother that he is not crazy, asks her to keep it a secret. Hamlet always thinks things through, a madman would just act on impulse". Furthermore, it is important that Hamlet acts out through madness because it adds depth to the plot. And, in doing so is contributing to the theme of appearance vs. reality, so it can be concluded that appearance vs. reality is indeed the most valuable theme. Symbolism found throughout Hamlet is used to demonstrate that things are not always what they seem. This relates to the theme of appearance vs. reality and reiterates its importance to the play. " I am too much in the sun. "These remarks by Hamlet are referring to the fact that he is not himself. This is detracted from the knowledge that when something is left in the sun, it begins to deteriorate and becomes a mere shell of itself. He continues on how the sun breed's maggots, and the tie is how Claudius is that. The evil that has been created is Claudius and he is a symbol of all evil and unjust. The next symbol is Laertes. He is symbolic of Hamlet because he is faced with the same dilemma but is the complete opposite in how he executes his revenge. In order for Hamlet to carry out his revenge, he constructs a play to re-enact what happened the night Claudius murdered King Hamlet. This is a symbol of Hamlet's behavior. He appears to be doing an ordinary thing, but in reality has a thought-out plan to catch Claudius red-handed. Laertes, on the other hand, bluntly goes out and decides he will kill Hamlet. He does not

plan, nor does he care what must be done to get his vengeance. " Let come what comes, only I'll be revenged most thoroughly for my father. " He exemplifies the stereotypical action character, because that is the usual sequence a character would take in a situation like that. Thus symbolically, the audience can see what the play would be like if Hamlet acted as Laertes: straightforward and without remorse. This would make the plot dull, and without suspense. Thus, the presence of the theme of appearance vs. reality is crucial to the development of the plot in the play. Throughout the play, Hamlet's actions seem inconsistent with his words, but that is to be expected from a character that is at times, insane. Thus many critics have commented on Hamlet's development and credibility of his actions. Hamlet ultimately was a failure; he was dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible because it exceeds the events that occur. Why so much emotion and so little action? There are countless theories on why Hamlet does delay his actions. Many of these theories suggest that it was because of his lack of acting naturally. Instead, he is working in the theme of appearance vs. reality, making things difficult and complex. Another popular theory is that Hamlet's delay was a state of mind ' quite abnormal and induced by special circumstances, a state of profound melancholy or excessive brooding that made him too upset to do anything. These theories confirm the fact that Hamlet is indeed the most intriguing character in western literature and that he follows suit with the theme of appearance vs. reality throughout the entire play, causing himself more problems than he could have prepared for. Moreover, the theme of appearance vs. reality is without a doubt the most important theme in Hamlet. It is the only clear-cut theme that spawns and

supports other themes, and therefore provides an origin for all other themes as well as the action and depth in the plot itself. It is obvious that no other theme could independently control the entire play as appearance vs. reality.