

Character analysis: hamlet

Literature



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Character Analysis: Hamlet William Shakespeare's Hamlet Prince of Denmark is today recognized as one of the most powerful works of English literature. Although written in the 16th century the play continues to be read and performed by contemporary audiences. The play itself follows the occurrences in the Castle of Elsinore, a location in Denmark. While there are a number of primary characters, the central protagonist is undoubtedly Prince Hamlet. Shakespeare implements Hamlet as a way of exploring questions of human meaning, revenge, and love. Hamlet is a highly complex character and is one of the most analyzed characters in Western literature. This essay presents a character analysis of Hamlet. When examining Hamlet's character there are a number of overriding concerns. Among these concerns is the perhaps the most prominent is the extent that Hamlet is truly made or is simply feigning his madness. Throughout the play Hamlet demonstrates a considerable character shift, at times seemingly pretending to be mad, while at other times truly exhibiting insanity. One considers Hamlet's interaction with Polonius in terms of the relative level of insanity he exhibits. Hamlet speaks in seemingly irrational non-sequitors; he asks, "Are you a fishmonger?" and later states, "For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a god kissing carrion,--Have you a daughter?" (Act II, scene ii). Even while this is apparent irrationality, it more accurately appears that Hamlet is implementing his intelligence and wit – two prominent characteristic elements – as a means of faking insanity and toying with Polonius. Still, in other instances Hamlet appears to be falling into a severe melancholy state demonstrating mental illness. One considers Hamlet's seminal 'to be or not to be' soliloquy in this context of investigation. In terms of this soliloquy it's been argued, "If Hamlet is portrayed as truly

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descending into madness, then one can take much of this soliloquy at face value. Hamlet really is depressed and thinking about killing himself as a means to end his "sea of troubles" ('bardweb'). In these regards, Hamlet's descent into madness is characterized by his suicidal thoughts. Adding credence to this perspective is the potential of ghost being entirely a figment of Hamlet's insanity. Ultimately, the question of insanity is central to understanding Hamlet's character. Another prominent consideration within Hamlet's character is the extent that he overthinks his murder of Claudius. Early in the play, the ghost of his father informs Hamlet that he must murder Claudius so that he (Hamlet's father) can escape purgatory. While Hamlet resolves to murder Claudius his hesitation to do so constitutes a major character element. One prominent chance Hamlet has is when Claudius is praying; still, he refrains from murdering him. It's argued that, "... Hamlet's arguments for not killing Claudius at prayers are both subtle and logical -- too subtle, in fact, considering the enormity of Claudius' deed and the virtual certainty that Hamlet possesses of his guilt" ('Shakespeare-Online'). In these regards, it appears that Hamlet is overly introspective and tentative. Still, in another situations it appears that Hamlet is merely attempting to gain a greater understanding of Claudius' guilt. Hamlet has a play performed, noting, "The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king" (Act II, scene ii). A counter-argument to Hamlet's character as overly introspective, it's that his is simply trying to ascertain the truth and that after he does so through this play, he sets out with newfound purpose to eliminate Claudius. It is only because of extenuating circumstances – Claudius praying, Hamlet being sent away, accidentally killing Polonius instead of Claudius – that prevent him from carrying out this act until the end of the

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play. Ultimately, it's clear that Hamlet is balancing competing impulses the complexity of which is not reducible to any one clear and distinct character interpretation. In conclusion, this essay has presented a character analysis of Prince Hamlet. In this context of understanding, the complexity of Hamlet's character is analyzed in terms of the extent of his madness and the degree to which he puts off murdering Claudius. In both instances it's revealed that Hamlet exhibits competing impulses – at times he is insane and at times he is feigning his insanity, at times he is genuinely attempting to ascertain Claudius' guilt and at other times he is overthinking. Ultimately, this complexity reveals that Hamlet's character and motivation is derived from the competing psychological impulses he is experiencing. References "

Analysis of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark." Shakespeare-Online. N. p., 2010. Web. 14 Dec 2011. . Shakespeare, William. " Hamlet: Entire Play." shakespeare. N. p., 2010. Web. 13 Dec 2011. . " Speech Analysis: Hamlet." bardweb. N. p., 2011. Web. 14 Dec 2011. .