
Insanity, Greed, And Love In Hamlet

Within the play 'Hamlet', Shakespeare utilises the manipulation of characters in order to convey themes such as insanity, greed, and love. These themes are all present at some point throughout the play and mainly conveyed by characters such as Hamlet, Claudius and Ophelia. The quote found within the Shakespearean play "Macbeth" "and nothing is but what is not" is represented throughout "Hamlet" by Shakespeare's utilisation of manipulation for the representation of the character.

The character Hamlet is portrayed throughout the play as somewhat "mad" yet we later find out that he was completely sane despite the dramatic scenes he caused. This is how Shakespeare has manipulated Hamlet's character to convey the theme of insanity and to an extent sanity. Shakespeare explores the use of manipulation with this character to communicate how Hamlet uncovers the truth about his father's death by being sanely insane. Hamlet is the protagonist and is consistently displayed as "insane" and is constantly causing a scene in order to sell his "insanity" yet as the audience soon discover his "insane" characteristic was a facade in order to get revenge on his uncle Claudius for being the reason of his father's death. "I am but mad north-north-west. When the wind is

southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw" (Act II scene II) Hamlet is seen conversing with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. This quote suggests that just as it is occasionally that the wind blows north-north-west, it matches how he only occasionally goes mad suggesting that although he is perceived as completely mad he is able to control his faculties whilst also being able to categorize right from wrong. In the second part of this quote "I know a hawk from a handsaw" this implies that Hamlet is warning both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that he can distinguish the difference between friend and enemy. With both of these said this very scene is one scene that shows how insanely sane Hamlet really is and sets the motive for his actions further along in the play and how Shakespeare is able to manipulate his character so that Hamlet is viewed in different perspectives and not just "mad".

Claudius is a character that displays an incredible amount of greed and the need for power, these desires are what leads to Claudius' actions throughout the play and are often the source of many of his "achievements". From the beginning of the play Claudius is perceived as the typical "bad guy" throughout the play yet he is only perceived that way because he murdered his brother for the throne then married his wife in order to gain control. Yet Shakespeare has manipulated this character to be viewed as such an evil character that the audience expect him to be completely unforgiving and damned.

"Oh, my offence is rank. It smells to Heaven.

It hath the primal eldest curse upon 't,

A brother's murder"

This quote suggests that to an extent Claudius is completely aware of how cursed his actions were. As he references the quote "primal eldest curse" that had been settled on his "offence"

he references Abel's death at the hands of his brother Cain as referenced in the bible. By using this reference he compares himself to something as holy as the bible almost using it to justify his actions as slightly "ranked" but it was done for a "holy reason". He is seen giving this quote at the start of a soliloquy in which he confesses to the audience and only the audience he had in fact murdered his brother in cold blood. Yet whilst this gives the audience comfort in knowing that Hamlet's conspiracy was proven to be right Claudius doesn't confess to any other character meaning that within the play Hamlet is still viewed as "mad".

"My words fly up; my thoughts remain below.

Words without thoughts never to heaven go." (act III, scene III)

This line is delivered in the scene where the audience witness Hamlet almost murder Claudius but doesn't for Claudius was praying and if he had killed him whilst praying he would have gone to heaven rather than hell. This line describes Claudius' reasoning for praying, he prays to attempt to repent his sin for murdering his brother. Although he begs for forgiveness Claudius doesn't believe his prayers and has a heavy doubt that his words mean nothing for he delivers another line "“May one be pardoned and retain th' offense?”"

By the end of the scene he is then questioning aloud whether or not his prayers and begging is being heard or accepted, this scene is one powerful scene for it gives the audience a perspective of Claudius that without it no one would understand his inner thoughts. The manipulation of this character Claudius displayed to the audience that although he is perceived as the "evil" character he is genuinely remorseful to an extent and as Hamlet shows in some scenes he doesn't believe his words.

Throughout the play Ophelia is constantly displayed as almost mindless but there are cases in which Ophelia is also shown genuinely confessing her feelings for Hamlet to other people such as her father Polonius. Ophelia is manipulated to be viewed as the "typical woman" of that era as she is ordered to do many things by both her father and the king Claudius.

"In few, Ophelia,

Do not believe his vows." (act 1 scene III)

Polonius is seen delivering this line toward Ophelia following her brother Laertes' warning about Hamlet's word of love. As her kinsman display there --- Ophelia wonders what exactly her father and brother could possibly know about how much his word is worth for neither of them has solid proof or any concrete reasons to prove his word is untrustworthy. Following this curiosity, Ophelia tends to get closer to Hamlet but as he starts to go "mad" so does Ophelia. Hamlet doesn't intend to make her go mad but as he further acts on his "insanity" she slowly descends into complete madness until she no longer is able to bare it and takes her own life. Yet the audience is seen only viewing her as a mindless girl who did what she was told, the scene in which the king and Polonius force her to draw the reasoning for Hamlet's madness as they hide and listen is a key scene into how the audience perceives her but as we look at it from a different perspective the audience then realises she has persuaded herself that his madness is because of his love for her. Ophelia is manipulated to be considered as a weak "mindless" character yet as the play is explored further the audience is then shown that she is mentally intact and that her love for Hamlet was strong until his madness broke her.

To conclude, the play “Hamlet” is an exploration of manipulation, the manipulation of characters and to an extent the manipulation of themes. The quote “And nothing is but what is not” is relevant throughout the entire play and is displayed through many characters including the ones that have been explored above. Shakespeare creates a deeper meaning of manipulation for character representation and uses this to capture the attention of the audience.