

Hamlet Essay

In William Shakespeare's Hamlet, a young prince, Hamlet, grieves the loss of his father, emotions fueled by the "overhasty marriage" of his mother to his uncle, Claudius. After discovering from the ghost of his father that it was, in fact, his uncle who had poisoned his father, he swears revenge. He decides to have an "antic disposition," and act as if he has indeed gone mad. Through his use of soliloquy, dialogue, and dramatic irony, Shakespeare creates Hamlet's dramatic shift ^{to} apparent ^{what does this actually mean?} madness. Through Hamlet's ^{good} supposed insanity, he argues that it often takes deception to uncover the truth.

Shakespeare's use of dialogue initially explains Hamlet's decision to "go mad" - or at least, to pretend to. After swearing revenge to the ghost of his father, he comes back to Marcellus and Horatio. To them, he reveals his plan to act crazy in order to catch Claudius. This establishes the initial behavior he intends to display, assuring them it will all be an act. This is Hamlet's initial deception - it is this which allows him to begin to attempt Claudius' demise. It is also mainly through dialogue that this "antic disposition" is established. Any time Hamlet talks to Polonius, he intentionally talks in circles, and plays on the double meanings of words through puns. Polonius is confused by this erratic behavior, and takes his leave of Hamlet. Through Hamlet faking madness, he reveals the foolishness of Polonius. Additionally, since Polonius is close to Claudius and deeply

involved in the royal court, these conversations reveal the corruptibility of the royals. Polonius sways his answers to match Hamlet's suggestions; this is symbolic of the ease with which the court, trapped under Claudius' regime, simply fill with the "disease" of the state. Through deception, this reveals the truth of the moral character of others.

Additionally monologue, ^{including soliloquy,} helps to show the inner workings of Hamlet's mind and allow the introduction of his sanity, or the ambiguity of it. When Hamlet is alone, he reveals his innermost thoughts out into the audience. For example, in his "To be or not to be..." soliloquy, Hamlet questions the worth or meaning of life; particularly in Elizabethan times, this would, to them, have signaled an instability of mind.

Here and further throughout the play, it is no longer completely clear whether or not Hamlet is simply acting. Towards the end of the play,

Hamlet finds a skull and proceeds to grasp it and reflect upon the idea of death. While this seems to be an unnatural or strange behavior, it is actually perfectly reasonable—Hamlet knows he will soon die, and is coming to terms with death.

Through his supposed madness, he gains clarity about the meaning of death and how it relates to him. The "insanity" allows him to reveal the reality of death.

Finally, Shakespeare uses dramatic irony to show truth throughout the play. When Hamlet is in his mother's closet, he once again sees

the ghost. His mother, however, cannot see it. The audience, however, saw the ghost, confirmed in the beginning of the play. Hamlet's mother questions his sanity; the audience knows the ghost must be real. Through his apparent madness - the screaming at his mother and calling out to a ghost she cannot see - he shows her the reality of her marriage to Claudius. The use of deception here causes another to look inward and see not only what is around them but also the truth about herself. In the ending, also, Hamlet's seeming overconfidence seems like madness to the others in the play, such as Horatio and Claudius, as he goes into a fencing wager he surely cannot win. However, this supposed madness is known by the audience to be the true acceptance of his fate. Due to the diseased state, it appears mad. However, through his acting "mad" he shows that he, rather than others, knows how the duel will end.

Hamlet's apparent madness seems to increase due to the increasing sickening of the court, where actions both he and the audience know are oft logical appear insane. Through his actions, he reveals truth - truth of the murder of a King, the character of another, and the nature of death. Without the deception, the truth would have been lost amongst the tangles of the situation, never coming to light. The "madness" illuminated the past, present, and future.