

Hamlet Act 3 Summary, Themes, and Characters

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Appearance and Reality in the Opening of Act Three

In Hamlet, Act 3, the use of the appearance versus reality theme has been used many times, but most significantly in Act 2 and act 3. The scenario of Hamlet's character in Act III is that he is exhibiting odd behavior after the murder of his father. He is mourning. The other two characters, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, are trying to find the reason behind Hamlet's odd behavior.

The characters of Claudius and Gertrude are informed by the former characters about the player's arrival. Act 3 happens to be with the characters of Claudius and Polonius, along with [Ophelia and Hamlet](#) meeting. The [theme of appearance vs. reality](#) is used in many scenes by the characters of the play, and it will be explored in the paper to know the connection of each character with the theme of the [play used by Hamlet](#) (Shakespeare).

The use of appearance in the scene is evident with the character impressions of Claudius, Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern. They all project the image of sincere and trustworthy persons. But the appearance is fake. They are devilish in reality. Hamlet is seeking evidence and trying to find the culprit behind his father's murder.

Polonius, Ophelia, and the Performance of Deception

Polonius strengthens the theme by putting words into the heads of Ophelia and Hamlet. Although he has the image of a sincere and loving person, he shows his other side in the play by falsifying the fact that Hamlet lusts after Ophelia. And he does not love her. From the quote, "Ay, (springs) ... how prodigal the soul" (1, 3 pages 124-125), it can be inferred that Polonius does know about the love Hamlet has for Ophelia. But he is concealing the truth and passing the wrong image of Hamlet in front of Ophelia. One character quality of Polonius is that he has a loving and caring image, yet he is deceitful.

In the conversation between Ophelia and Hamlet, Hamlet angrily mentions to Ophelia that beauty kills honesty or truth. Women are self-destructive. They mask the reality behind their makeup. The makeup is a fake appearance that they use to hide their age or grief. The reality is behind this

pleasant mask. The character of Ophelia is heartbroken, which she hides behind the mask.

In the given words, "I have heardanother." (III, I, I, 144-145)

In the world of Hamlet, women are always an entity of deception and purged beauty. They do not seem what they are. Hamlet criticizes Ophelia for hiding the heartbrokenness behind false beauty.

The Play Within the Play and Claudius's Guilt

In scene 2, Act 3 of Hamlet, the organized lay directed by Hamlet proceeds with the confronting mission of proving Claudius guilty of murder. Hamlet instructs the play by using the image of Claudius as the culprit in the murder of old Hamlet. He takes the support of Claudius' appearance to prove the guilt of Claudius. The murder of the king is shown by Claudius' abrupt behavior after watching the scene of poison insertion into the king's ear. The use of the king's appearance in the play instigates Claudius and unleashes the reality of Claudius.

From the quotation, "O! My offense.....intent" (Act III, iii, 37-42), Claudius is in the chapel for prayer, but the words from the scene show his guilt and tell about the deception that he gave. Hamlet wanted to take revenge to this point with his sword, but he did not because he knew that a person who is praying would go to heaven, and Claudius is praying. He wants him in hell. Claudius pretends to be praying, and Hamlet is deceived by the appearance of Claudius when the reality is different.

The characters of Guildenstern and Rosencrantz apparently showed the childhood buddies in the play to Hamlet, and they are supposed to be loyal to Hamlet. But they are also taking the support of the fake appearance or personification in front of Hamlet. From the words,

"Blood.....upon me" (III, ii, 363-366)

It is evident that both these characters are trying to support Hamlet in coping with the madness that he has been going through, but in reality, they are saving Claudius, the king. They are the supporters of lies, and their nature is fake. They display loyalty towards Claudius and his matters rather than helping Hamlet tackle the grief of his father's death.

Madness, Corruption, and the Masks of Hamlet's Characters

Throughout the play, Hamlet's character has justified the theme of appearance vs. reality. Every character appears to be one thing on the outside and one thing on the inner side. The main character, Hamlet, surrounds reality, and he portrays madness and insanity, but he is using a mask to hide the quest for the truth behind the murder. The rest of the characters display a loving attitude, but in reality, they are deceptive. The whole theme encompasses the Danish kingdom and hides the

characters under layers of deception. Corruption and crime.

The female characters, Ophelia and Gertrude, link the theme with the corruption going on in their lives. Ophelia first hides her feelings for Hamlet, but later she shows them on the advice of her father who is interested in Hamlet. Gertrude also justifies the theme with the intention of corruption. She does not want to be loved for the murder and denies the reality because it would hinder the happiness and illusion she created for herself with Claudius.

The character of Hamlet himself wore the mask of madness he organised a plan to investigate the reality. The other aspect of Hamlet's image is revenge. A person who has true feelings or love for others does not behave in a revengeful manner. The focus of Hamlet throughout the play is on the revenge for his father's death. Although the character of Hamlet became open as the play progressed and moved out of the theme, the fundamental theme of the play remained strong for Hamlet at the start of the play.

References

William Shakespeare. *Hamlet: The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. n.d.
<http://shakespeare.mit.edu/hamlet/full.html>.