

William Shakespeare's play Hamlet discusses the inner turmoil of the eponymous protagonist, and his inner demons. The role of madness is used to disguise facts and reveal hidden sides of the characters. The world of other people is to us, a world of appearance, and Hamlet is essentially, a play about the difficulty of living in such a world. An important theme is that of uncertainty, which I shall argue is vital to our interpreting the play, as is the character of Ophelia.

Hamlet is the tale of a Danish prince whose father is murdered by Hamlet's uncle, who marries Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, and claims the throne. After a visit by the apparent ghost of his father, Hamlet vows to seek revenge and acts mad in order to throw his uncle off guard as he plots to kill him. Hamlet is an embodiment of procrastination, turning down many opportunities to avenge his father, making various excuses. He does not know whether to trust the ghost or not, and as readers we have no knowledge of whether this apparition is there to guide or mislead him. Polonius is convinced Hamlet has turned mad out of love for his daughter, Ophelia. He believes his madness is 'the very ecstasy of love'. [1] However, we then have the scene where Claudius spies on the pair in which we see this is not the case. Hamlet tells Ophelia four times to 'get thee to a nunnery' [2] and that he does not love her or want to be with her.

It is an interesting fact to consider the ways the play shows us how many uncertainties our lives are built upon. The message we can take away from Hamlet is that it is much more difficult to make decisions with narrow judgements, no matter how important they may be. There is a dominant focus on Hamlet as a philosophical thinker who delays taking action because his knowledge is uncertain of his uncle's crime. Hamlet struggles to 'hold together the many pieces of the jigsaw of human being'. [3] His altogether tragic dilemma is to try kill Claudius without becoming the same beast he holds him to be. Hamlet deliberates whether or not his uncle did commit murder, and he tries to find proof, such as using a group of travelling actors. He gets them to act out a scene which he believes is similar to how Claudius would have murdered his father, in the hope he will be able to gauge his uncle's reaction. Sure enough, Claudius is visibly shocked by the scene and flees. Hamlet then goes to kill him, now convinced but finds him praying. He decides that killing Claudius in prayer means he would go to heaven, so vows to kill him later. This is another example of uncertainty as although he wants to kill Claudius, he wants him to then suffer.

Polonius's death is accidental on Hamlet's part, yet it gave us the first sign that Hamlet was actually capable of violence and avenging his father. Having gone to confront his mother, where Polonius had been concealed behind a curtain, Hamlet had heard a noise and assumed it was Claudius. He rashly stabbed him before discovering the true identity of his victim. Hamlet pleads insanity for the crime, which is not difficult for those around him to believe, which is why he is not instantly put to death. The play shows Hamlet's long journey to reach the 'state of "readiness" for death' [4], whereby he is no longer afraid.

Hamlet has nobody on his side, as even his own mother and uncle have betrayed him. His two childhood friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are used by Claudius to spy on him and accompany him to England with his death sentence. Ophelia did love him, but he spurned her and killed her father, which turned her mad, resulting in her death. Whilst

Hamlet has been sent to England, Ophelia ends up drowning in the brook. We are not outright told if this is accidental or suicide. Hamlet arrives back as Ophelia's funeral is taking place. He is heartbroken and tried to fight Laertes, now claiming he loved her all along. The mixed emotions shown by Hamlet tell us he is uncertain about every aspect of his life, including love. With Ophelia gone, Hamlet feels completely alone.

Laertes is the character who embodies everything Hamlet does not have but wishes he did. Once he finds out his father and sister are dead, Laertes's rage is instant and he vows to seek revenge. Unlike with Hamlet, he has no qualms and we believe he will actually be capable of murder. Claudius plans to use Laertes's rage to his advantage and sets up a duel for the two. The blade of Laertes's sword will be poisoned so Hamlet will definitely die. This final battle claims the life of many major characters. Gertrude dies after drinking poisoned wine intended for Hamlet, and her death spurs him on to kill Laertes. Claudius is next in the emotionally-charged Hamlet's sights, and finally revenge is achieved for the old King. Hamlet dies shortly after.

The character of Ophelia is critical in interpreting the piece, and her death is also an important scene. It is difficult to decipher if Hamlet still loves Ophelia even whilst he spurns her. Her character is vital in showing that Hamlet as human, possibly capable of love, and her death visibly shocks and upsets him. Her madness is obvious after her father's death, especially in her erratic singing focusing on death: 'Go to thy death-bed, He will never come again'. [5] When Gertrude describes Ophelia's death, we are told 'an envious sliver broke' [6] meaning the branch of the tree snapped causing her to fall into the water, so she did not commit suicide. However, with the fact that her father has been killed by Hamlet, we could argue there could have easily been suicidal thoughts. Her pain and grief may have been too much for her, which is why she drowned instead of trying to swim and fight for her life.

William Shakespeare's play Hamlet discusses the inner turmoil of the eponymous protagonist, and his inner demons. The role of madness is used to reveal the true sides of the characters. Hamlet is shown to be capable of avenging his father eventually, but remains uncertain about every decision and procrastinates against every task he is given. The character of Ophelia is used to show Hamlet as a relatable character, failing miserably in love and unable to be certain about his feelings.