

Explore Shakespeare's use of conflict in Hamlet.

Shakespeare portrays conflict in Hamlet in a variety of different ways on different levels. Conflict is a main theme that is present throughout the entire play, although the theme of conflict takes on many forms such as emotional, external and internal conflict. Shakespeare shows how varied the theme of conflict truly as mostly all the characters experience some sort of conflict throughout the duration of the play.

The most obvious and perhaps the most important conflict of the play is the physical conflict between Hamlet and King Claudius. This external conflict develops due to pressure to move on from his father's death from his uncle and mother, and partly as a result of his own personal internal conflict. The central conflict between Hamlet and Claudius initially begins as an internal conflict yet gradually develops into an external and physical conflict as the play progresses. Shakespeare shows the progression of this conflict through Hamlet's many soliloquies. The idea of revenge and a conflict with Claudius is introduced by the ghost at the end of Act 1, and in Hamlet's second soliloquy he describes his uncle Claudius as a "smiling damned villain" and swears to remember and obey the Ghost's wishes; however here the conflict is just an idea. However, as the play progresses to Hamlet's sixth soliloquy he decides to kill Claudius when he is "dun", asleep, or in his rage, or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed, at gaming, swearing or about some act that has no relish of salvation in it" so it is ensured that he will go to hell. By Hamlet's last soliloquy he comes to the realisation that everyone has a purpose to fulfil and that this conflict with Claudius is his. The horrific images of "a father killed, a mother stained" is the powerful motive for Hamlet to initiate the conflict. This soliloquy is a pivotal moment for Hamlet as it is the moment where he stops fantasizing about the conflict and revenge and starts acting on his thought as he vows "from this time forth, my thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!" However, this infamous conflict only takes place at the very end of the play; romantic critic Samuel Coleridge argues that this is because Hamlet is a man "whose intellectual energy and alertness understandably made action impossible".

Moreover, Shakespeare shows how conflict does not always have to be represented physically, though Claudius's manipulation of Laertes. Claudius wishes to have Laertes kill Hamlet for him and so Claudius flatters Laertes. Similarly he makes Laertes feel guilty for not avenging his father Polonius's death as he asks him: "what would you undertake to show yourself in deed your father's son more than in words?" Together Claudius and Laertes plan to poison both the sword to stab Hamlet with, and his drink to ensure his death. This central conflict is a physical display of pure hatred that ultimately results in not only the loss of their own lives, but also many of those around them. This level of violence epitomizes conflict as a means of expression, and provides a tangible connection with