
A Theme Of Deception And Justice William Shakespeare's Plays

Deception is a rather popular theme within Shakespeare's plays. In *The Merchant of Venice*, deception is something that is used for various purposes; to be harmful, protective, or for personal gain. Shylock uses deception when Antonio asks to borrow money. He agrees to lend him the money if Antonio is willing to sign an agreement that would allow Shylock to have a pound of his flesh if he cannot pay him back. I am sure that Antonio did not believe that Shylock would actually kill him if he cannot pay him back, as taking a pound of flesh from someone would likely cause them to die. Antonio probably thought that Shylock was being provocative, or even just funny, though he agrees to Shylock's condition. We, though, know that Shylock was being false and was deceiving Antonio to get revenge against him.

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, deception is used as well. The play shows that deceit is not necessarily always evil, but can often-times, lead to a bad ending. Claudio and Don Pedro are deceived, which results in Hero's disgrace, while, more lightheartedly, Beatrice and Benedick are fooled into believing that each loves the other, although, they truly do fall in love in the end. When Claudio has shamed Hero, because he has been deceived, Leonato tells everyone that Hero has died to punish Claudio, although she had not. When he comes to marry Leonato's niece, a group of women enter and he must wed "blindly". He, guiltily, asks who he is going to marry, and he feels such guilt because he has spoken so harshly and slanderously of an innocent woman, but because he cares more about Leonato's favor, rather than who he is going to marry- which is obviously not for love.

In *Othello*, deceit and manipulation go hand in hand. Iago plots incredibly carefully to manipulate Othello, with literally and absolutely no proof, that his wife, Desdemona, has been unfaithful. He understands exactly how to deceive and manipulate Othello, especially because of Othello's social and cultural background. He understands that he must be clever and patient and work "his deceptive magic" with time. Eventually, it works and Othello tragically murders his loving, faithful wife because of the deceptive Iago. It is very, very tragic, indeed. Justice is another theme that pops up time and time again within Shakespeare's play.

In *The Tempest*, justice is more like an illusion. Prospero had been sent away with his daughter, by his brother, to die so that his brother could overtake the throne. Prospero, within the play, is hell-bent on reestablishing his power and finding the justice that he believes that he deserves. Since Prospero controls everyone's fate, as he is a magician and in manipulative of all of the characters, his concept of justice is not only incredibly subjective, but also hypocritical, as he has absolutely no issue with enslaving Ariel and Caliban to get what he wants. Justice, within the play, is only about what is good for Prospero. At the end of the play, though, he becomes sympathetic and justice (meaning Prospero) wins, but also everyone else does too, which makes for a happy ending.

Justice in *King Lear*, though, does not cause the play to have a happy ending. Terrible event after terrible event causes us, as the reader or viewer, to question if justice exists at all within the play; spoiler alert- it does not. The wicked die and the good die along with them; much because of the evil and cunning character, Edgar's jealousy as a bastard who wants to be

recognized as royalty.

Within Hamlet, justice is essentially as non-existent as it is in King Lear. The play starts off with the king being murdered by his cold-hearted brother, Claudius. His ghost appears in the castle, demanding Prince Hamlet to avenge his father's murder. Hamlet, at first, does not know what to do, but then realizes, after deceptively causing his uncle to "confess" of the murder (by making actor's act out his father's last moments of life to get some sort of reaction out of Claudius), that he absolutely must take revenge. Hamlet acts as if he is mad, throughout the play (although he just may be a little), and is horrid to the person whom he loves the most, Ophelia, although his hurtful words and actions towards her are also very deceptive and, through a chain of events that are all the cause and effect of Hamlet's "madness", she dies. Claudius is incredibly deceptive throughout the play and tries to get Hamlet killed various times, although, in the end, his deception causes the death of his beloved, new wife, Gertrude, as well as the death of various others (including Hamlet's friends and Ophelia's brother), and himself. When Hamlet dies in the end, sin and deception has officially come full-circle.

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