Hamlet Essay, Research Paper

Hamlet: Brutal Truth Disillusionment. Depression. Despair. These are the burning emotionschurning in young Hamlet’s soul as he attempts to come to terms with hisfather’s death and his mother’s incestuous, illicit marriage. WhileHamlet tries to pick up the pieces of his shattered idealism, heconsciously embarks on a quest to seek the truth hidden in Elsinore;this, in stark contrast to Claudius’ fervent attempts to obscure thetruth of murder. Deception versus truth; illusion versus reality. In theplay, Prince Hamlet is constantly having to differentiate amongst them.However, there is always an exception to the rule, and in this case, theexception lies in Act 2, Scene 2, where an “honest” conversation (sansthe gilded trappings of deceit) takes place between Hamlet andRosenkrantz and Guildenstern. Via the use of prose and figurativelanguage, Shakespeare utilizes the passage to illustrate Hamlet’s viewof the cosmos and mankind. Throughout the play, the themes of illusion and mendaciousness havebeen carefully developed. The entire royal Danish court is ensnared in aweb of espionage, betrayal, and lies. Not a single man speaks his mind,nor addresses his purpose clearly. As Polonius puts it so perfectly:”And thus do we of wisdom and of reach^+By indirections find directions out”Act 2, Scene 2, Lines 71-3The many falsehoods and deceptions uttered in Hamlet are expressedthrough eloquent, formal, poetic language (iambic pentameter),tantamount to an art form. If deceit is a painted, ornate subject then,its foil of truth is simple and unvarnished. Accordingly, when thepretenses of illusion are discarded in Act 2, Scene 2, the language iswritten in direct prose. Addressing Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet pleads with them todeliver up honest speech about the intent of their arrival:”[offer up] Anything but to th’ purpose.”Act 2, Scene 2, Line 300In a gesture of extreme significance, in a quote complementary toPolonius’ aforementioned one, Hamlet demands:”Be even and direct with me whether youwere sent for or no.”Act 2, Scene 2, Lines 310-11 Being the bumbling fools they are, Rosenkrantz and Guildensterndisclose their intentions and purposes to Hamlet, revealing the King andQueen’s instructions. Thus does truth prevail in this passage. For thisreason, the whole passage is devoid of the “artful” poetic devices thatare used in the better portion of the play. The recurring motif of corruption also appears in the passage. Due tothe wicked internal proceedings in the state of Denmark (e.g. murder,incest), Shakespeare implies that the whole state is “soiled”, which inturn has a direct negative consequence in the grand universal scheme ofthings. Imagery of warped and distasteful plants, in place of the

traditional “aesthetically correct” beautiful flowers in a garden,serves to further reinforce the degeneration theme:”‘Tis an unweeded garden that growsto seed. Things rank and gross in naturepossess it merely.”Act 1, Scene 2Essentially, all of life, and all that was good and beautiful in life(e.g. the garden) is sullied. Hamlet, the disillusioned idealist, continues with the motif when hedisheartenedly declares:”the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory^+” -Act 2, Scene 2, Lines 321-2[the air] “why, it appeareth nothing to me but a fouled and pestilent congregation of vapors.”-Act 2, Scene 2, Lines 325-6The above lines represent Hamlet’s cosmic view on the planet. He findsthe world to be empty and lifeless, dirty and diseased, and hisparticular place in it to be desolate and lonely. Indeed, he feels soisolated and entrapped in his native land that he says:[the world is a prison] “A goodly one, in which there are many confines,wards, and dungeons, Denmark being one o’ th’ worst.”-Act 2, Scene 2, Lines 264-6This view of the world exemplifies the micro/macro concept, whereDenmark is the “micro” manifestation of a prison for our hero. The taintof “micro” Denmark leads to repercussions that in turn affect the wholeuniversal order, leading to the consequence of the world itself becomingthe “macro” manifestation of a prison in Hamlet’s eyes. Further along in the same paragraph, Hamlet offers up his opinion onman, extolling his virtues and excellent qualities (”what a piece ofwork is man^+”). Yet, it is tremendously ironic, that the ideal type ofman Hamlet is describing is nowhere to be found in the play. Hamlethimself is indecisive, unable to take action, Claudius is a slave to hislusts and passions, Polonius is a simpering, servile old fool, andRosenkrantz and Guildenstern are mindless ninnies. Quite simply, no”true man” as Hamlet describes him exists in the play. As a result of this dismal realization, and because of his inability toadapt to the “unnatural state of things in Denmark”, Hamlet has lost thelove for life he once had. This loss of enthusiasm also stems from thefact that he intrinsically knows there is more wickedness brewing underthe superficial illusionary surface of calm that Claudius is trying topromote. As a culmination of all these factors, Hamlet loses all faithin man:”And yet, to me, what is thisquintessence of dust?”Scene 2, Act 2, Lines 332-3 Drawing on Biblical allusions, Hamlet redefines the position of man assimply “that which came from dust”. From this stance, it is inferredthat solely God is Truth. Man, coming from the lowly earth, cannot bedepended upon to deliver pure and true thoughts, as his source of originitself is impure and unclean. If one establishes this rationality formankind’s nature, then all the characters in the play can be accountedfor.