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| **Quote #1**  QUEEN GERTRUDE  Why seems it so particular with thee? HAMLET  Seems, madam! nay it is; I know not 'seems.' 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother, Nor customary suits of solemn black, Nor windy suspiration of forced breath, No, nor the fruitful river in the eye, Nor the dejected 'havior of the visage, Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief, That can denote me truly: these indeed seem, For they are actions that a man might play: But I have that within which passeth show; These but the trappings and the suits of woe. (1.2.2) |

From his very first scene, Hamlet sets himself up as someone who hates deception and values inner truth above all. Here, he insists that outward appearances (like his "inky" black clothing, sighs, and tears – all the common markers of grief) can't possibly "denote" what's truly inside him. In other words, Hamlet's saying that his anguish and grief over his father's death are far more intense that they appear to the outside world. He's also implying that Gertrude, Claudius, and the rest of the court are totally fake and disingenuous because they don't care about him or his feelings at all and are far too concerned with keeping up appearances.

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| **Quote #2**  POLONIUS This above all: to thine ownself be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man. (1.3.1) |

Polonius likes to dish advice, as when he says that if you are true to yourself, you cannot deceive anyone else. Given Polonius's penchant for spying on his children and Hamlet in order to curry favor with King Claudius, he's not in any position to be talking about truth. We're reminded that when these kinds of cliché sayings are carelessly bandied about, they don't seem to carry any meaning at all.

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| **Quote #3**  GHOST Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast, With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts,— O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power So to seduce!—won to his shameful lust The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen: O Hamlet, what a falling-off was there! From me, whose love was of that dignity That it went hand in hand even with the vow I made to her in marriage, and to decline Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor To those of mine! But virtue, as it never will be moved, Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven, So lust, though to a radiant angel link'd, Will sate itself in a celestial bed, And prey on garbage. (1.5.9) |

Like Hamlet, the ghost dwells on Gertrude's "seeming" virtue. Critics are a bit divided over what this means. Is the ghost saying Gertrude cheated on him when they were married? Or, does the ghost merely see her remarriage as a betrayal. The debate comes down to the meaning of "adulterate," which, in Elizabethan England could refer to a cheating spouse or any sexual sin in general (like incest). Either way, the ghost implies that his marriage to Gertrude was a sham. Like young Hamlet, the ghost sees Gertrude as an unfaithful woman with a serious sexual appetite.

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| **Quote #4**  HAMLET O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain! My tables,—meet it is I set it down, That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain; At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark: (1.5.10) |

Now that the ghost (who claims to be the spirit of Old Hamlet) has revealed that King Claudius's a murderer, the prince realizes that his instincts are correct –everything in Denmark's court, from the King on down, is a big lie.

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| **Quote #5**  Marry, sir, here's my drift; And I believe, it is a fetch of wit: You laying these slight sullies on my son, As 'twere a thing a little soil'd i' the working, Mark you, Your party in converse, him you would sound, Having ever seen in the prenominate crimes The youth you breathe of guilty, be assured He closes with you in this consequence; 'Good sir,' or so, or 'friend,' or 'gentleman,' According to the phrase or the addition Of man and country. (2.1.8) |

Here, Polonius instructs his servant to spread rumors about his son, Laertes, in the hopes of finding out about Laertes's true behavior. (The idea is that Laertes will open up to Reynoldo about all his dirty little secrets and Reynoldo can then tattle to Polonius.) Polonius believes that deception may be the best route to the truth. Obviously, this way of thinking has some major flaws. We also notice that this is pretty much the same method Hamlet uses to find out whether or not the ghost is telling the truth about Claudius. It seems like Hamlet is completely deceptive when he pretends to be a madman.

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| **Quote #6**  At such a time I'll loose my daughter to him: Be you and I behind an arras then; Mark the encounter: (2.2.12) |

Polonius is in collusion with the King over deceiving Hamlet. Based on Hamlet's own personal sense of justice, under which betrayal and deception deserve death, perhaps this is why Hamlet doesn't feel guilty when he accidentally stabs Polonius.

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| **Quote #7**  HAMLET You were sent for; and there is a kind of confession in your looks which your modesties have not craft enough to colour: I know the good king and queen have sent for you. (2.2.25) |

Hamlet's old friends try to deceive him, but Hamlet sees right through it. The force (of sensing deception) is strong in this guy.

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| **Quote #8**  KING CLAUDIUS [Aside] O, 'tis too true! How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience! The harlot's cheek, beautied with plastering art, Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it Than is my deed to my most painted word: O heavy burthen! (3.1.4) |

Claudius is aware of the implications of his scheming and lies. What's interesting about this passage is the way his sexist remarks align his own deception with the use of cosmetics. The king compares his "painted word[s]" (every lie he tells) to the way a "harlot" "plasters" her face with makeup. This has some serious implications for the way the play associates women with deception, which you can read about by going to "Quotes" for the theme of "Gender." While you're there, be sure to check out our discussion of Hamlet's very similar remarks about women, makeup, and deception at 3.1.12.

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| **Quote #9**  HAMLET […] Where's your father? OPHELIA At home, my lord. HAMLET Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool no where but in's own house. Farewell. (3.1.9) |

Hamlet seems to know that Polonius is using Ophelia as bait to spy on him. When he confronts her, Ophelia lies to him outright. What's so terrible about all this is that Ophelia has no choice in the matter – as an unmarried daughter she must obey her father's orders (to stop seeing Hamlet and, here, to participate in Polonius's deception).

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| **Quote #10**  HAMLET Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass: and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ; yet cannot you make it speak. 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, yet you cannot play upon me. (3.2.56) |

When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern try to get Hamlet to confide in them (so they can report back to the king), Hamlet is furious. Here, he makes an analogy between deception and playing a musical instrument to demonstrate why his friends can't "play" him – they're simply not skilled enough. This, as we know, is what gets Rosencrantz and Guildenstern killed.

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| **Quote #11**  HAMLET An earnest conjuration from the king, As England was his faithful tributary, As love between them like the palm might flourish, As peace should stiff her wheaten garland wear And stand a comma 'tween their amities, And many such-like 'As'es of great charge, That, on the view and knowing of these contents, Without debatement further, more or less, He should the bearers put to sudden death, Not shriving-time allow'd. HORATIO How was this seal'd? HAMLET Why, even in that was heaven ordinant. I had my father's signet in my purse, Which was the model of that Danish seal; Folded the writ up in form of the other, Subscribed it, gave't the impression, placed it safely, The changeling never known. Now, the next day Was our sea-fight; and what to this was sequent Thou know'st already. HORATIO So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to't. HAMLET Why, man, they did make love to this employment; They are not near my conscience; their defeat Does by their own insinuation grow. (5.2.6) |

Hamlet gleefully describes to Horatio how he got revenge on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern by sending them to their deaths. He says this is fair repayment for the way they treated him and the deceit they practiced. Horatio, by the way, is Hamlet's only loyal friend. He's also the only main character to survive the bloodbath at the end of the play.

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| **Quote #12**  LAERTES I am justly kill'd with mine own treachery. (5.2.12) |

It is poison that ultimately brings down Laertes, Claudius, Gertrude, and Hamlet, both Laertes and Claudius die as a result of the poison they prepared for the Prince. The literally poisonous deception they practiced turns against them, and Laertes admits that they are fairly punished by their own dirty scheme.