

“Hamlet” As a Tragedy of Revenge

Arazdurdiyeva Annasoltan Narbayevna

Student of the Faculty of Foreign Languages of the Nukus State Pedagogical Institute named after
Ajiniyaz

Abstract: The topicality of the given article is "Hamlet" is written by William Shakespeare who was the greatest English poet and playwright. Hamlet is the first tragedy in Shakespeare's series of great tragedies which is believed to be published in between 1601 and 1603. This play is one of his successful, perfect and best plays ever known. Hamlet centers on the problems arising from love, death, and betrayal, without offering the audience a decisive and positive resolution to these complications for Hamlet himself is ambiguous and the answers to these problems are complex. It was a common tradition during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to borrow ideas and stories from earlier literary works.

Keywords: Hamlet, tragedy, playwright, love, death, king, characters.

William Shakespeare was an actor, playwright, poet, and theatre entrepreneur in London during the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean eras. He was baptised on 26 April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire, England, in the Holy Trinity Church. At the age of 18 he married Anne Hathaway with whom he had three children. He died in his home town of Stratford on 23 April 1616, aged 52.

William Shakespeare’s Career

Around the 1580s, Shakespeare arrived in London. By the 1590s, he was partnered with Lord Chamberlain’s Men. It was an acting company that he was connected to for most of his career. Later, it was renamed King’s Men due to the crowning of King James I.

Shakespeare mainly was earning a living as an actor and playwright. By 1597, he had already published 15 of his plays. During his lifetime, Shakespeare became quite wealthy. He purchased a real estate property near Stratford that doubled in value and brought him profit. That allowed him to write his plays without interruptions for work. Being an entrepreneur and an artist, he purchased the second-largest house in Stratford for his family.

Hamlet tragedy

The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, often shortened to Hamlet (/ˈhæmlɪt/), is a tragedy written by William Shakespeare sometime between 1599 and 1601. It is Shakespeare's longest play, with 29,551 words. Set in Denmark, the play depicts Prince Hamlet and his attempts to exact revenge against his uncle, Claudius, who has murdered Hamlet's father in order to seize his throne and marry Hamlet's mother. Hamlet is considered among the "most powerful and influential tragedies in the English language", with a story capable of "seemingly endless retelling and adaptation by others".

There are many works that have been pointed to as possible sources for Shakespeare's play—from ancient Greek tragedies to Elizabethan plays. The editors of the Arden Shakespeare question the idea of "source hunting", pointing out that it presupposes that authors always require ideas from other works for their own, and suggests that no author can have an original idea or be an originator.

When Shakespeare wrote, there were many stories about sons avenging the murder of their fathers, and many about clever avenging sons pretending to be foolish in order to outsmart their foes. This would include the story of the ancient Roman, Lucius Junius Brutus, which Shakespeare apparently knew, as well as the story of Amleth, which was preserved in Latin by 13th-century chronicler Saxo Grammaticus in his *Gesta Danorum*, and printed in Paris in 1514. The Amleth story was subsequently adapted and then published in French in 1570 by the 16th-century scholar François de Belleforest. It has a number of plot elements and major characters in common with Shakespeare's Hamlet, and lacks others that are found in Shakespeare. Belleforest's story was first published in English in 1608, after Hamlet had been written, though it's possible that Shakespeare had encountered it in the French-language version.

Three different early versions of the play are extant: the First Quarto (Q1, 1603); the Second Quarto (Q2, 1604); and the First Folio (F1, 1623). Each version includes lines and passages missing from the others.

Characters:

Hamlet – son of the late king and nephew of the present king, Claudius

Claudius – King of Denmark, Hamlet's uncle and brother to the former king

Gertrude – Queen of Denmark and Hamlet's mother

Polonius – chief counsellor to the king

Ophelia – Polonius's daughter

Horatio – friend of Hamlet

Laertes – Polonius's son

Voltimand and Cornelius – courtiers

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern – courtiers, friends of Hamlet

Osrice – a courtier

Marcellus – an officer

Barnardo – an officer

Francisco – a soldier

Reynaldo – Polonius's servant

Ghost – the ghost of Hamlet's father

Fortinbras – prince of Norway

Gravediggers – a pair of sextons

The cause and consequence of revenge in the tragedy.

The typical Elizabethan theatre-goer attending the first production of 'Hamlet' in 1604 would have had clear expectations. The conventions of Elizabethan revenge tragedy were already well established, drawn initially from the Senecan model of revenge tragedy, which combined bloody and treacherous actions with sententious moralising, and later developed by Thomas Kyd, who established the 'Kydian Formula.' This framework, comprising all the typical elements of an Elizabethan revenge tragedy, appeared in 'The Spanish Tragedy' and begins with a murder, committed by a subsequent King, who is thus beyond the reach of the law. The victim's ghost, returning from Purgatory to command his son to avenge his death, functions as a Chorus in the

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course of the play. His revenging son pretends to be mad and presents a dumb-show in court in order that he may be confident of the murderer's blame. The play, full of melodrama and rhetoric, ends with the death of almost all the characters, including the murderer, revenge and revenger's accomplice. In 'Hamlet,' Shakespeare ensures that he adheres to all of Kyd's salient elements. Therefore, Sydney Bolt's contention that Shakespeare deviates from the conventions of revenge tragedy is highly disputable. In fact, Shakespeare transcends these conventions, producing something far more powerful than a traditional revenge tragedy. However, by building upon the structure of a conventional revenge tragedy to create what emerges as more of a psychological drama, the playwright instead focuses on the tortured personality of the protagonist and his motivation, rather than the act of revenge itself.

Shakespeare uses Hamlet's soliloquies to convey to the audience his instability and depression. In Act I, scene ii he exclaims 'O, that this too too sallied flesh would melt,' because he sees all the ways of ordinary life simply as 'weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable.' Shakespeare uses the image of an 'unweeded garden' as a metaphor for Hamlet's own existence, full of worthless things that in their coarseness are choking his life. From this torturous despair and self-doubt stems his indecision, even concerning his own hopelessness; 'To be, or not to be - that is the question.' Hamlet's dilemma as to whether he should end his life or not is followed by a sequence of rhetorical questions:

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?

These emphasise further his philosophising about suicide and his uncertainty about his situation, and appear almost as if Hamlet is conducting a rhetorical exercise in a matter of philosophical debate. Significantly, Hamlet does not use the first person 'I' but abstracts the speech further with the accumulation of infinitives; 'To be', 'To die', 'to sleep'. Whilst Hamlet clearly seems to be talking about suicide, the impersonal impression this removes actually distances the speech further from the character and the audience, and the metatheatrical effect prompts not only the individual Hamlet but also the audience to consider the nature of life and reality.

Indeed, there seems to be very little consistency in Hamlet's life; his father has been murdered, and his own mother has married the murderer only a short time after the funeral, and his lover, Ophelia, has 'denied him access', at her father's prompting. The fact that both the two women in his life seem to have rejected him obviously fuels his ardent misogyny: 'Frailty, thy name is woman!' (I, ii). What is clear is Shakespeare's concentration on the nature of the protagonist, rather than on the subject of revenge, as in Act III Scene I the tension between Hamlet and Ophelia is obvious from the outset. She addresses him as 'Good my lord', but what dominates the conversation is Hamlet talking about his loss of faith in women.

Shakespeare's treatment of revenge in Hamlet is unusual because whilst revenge is clearly the subject matter fuelling the plot, it is only a subsidiary issue. Far more central is Hamlet's inability to take revenge, coupled with his instability, indecision and misogyny. Shakespeare creates a conventionally structured revenge tragedy but ensures that his hero is not trapped within these confines. By making use of theatrical conventions such as soliloquies and asides, Shakespeare not only builds a relationship between the hero and the audience, but also allows the audience to see into the mind of the hero and understand what he is feeling. By erecting a psychological drama

within the structure of revenge tragedy, Shakespeare ensures that the essence of the play is not revenge in itself, but the psychological and emotional study of Hamlet's disturbed character.

Conclusion

William Shakespeare is widely considered the greatest dramatist of all time as well as the most influential writer in the history of the English language. He originated hundreds of words and phrases that English speakers use to this day. His impact on literature is so massive that one could make an argument that every one of his works deserves a spot on this list, but these seven plays and one poetry collection are undoubtedly among his most important achievements. Also, William Shakespeare's books are incredibly popular. People study them at educational institutions and interpret them in plays.

Shakespeare remains vital because his plays present people and situations that we recognize today. His characters have an emotional reality that transcends time, and his plays depict familiar experiences, ranging from family squabbles to falling in love to war. The fact that his plays are performed and adapted around the world underscores the universal appeal of his storytelling.

As many of Shakespeare's plays end "Hamlet," is a tragedy with a great deal of death in the conclusion. The queen is dead from poison that was meant for Hamlet. The king is dead of poison that was forced down his throat by Hamlet in revenge for the death of his father and now his mother. Laertes tells Hamlet that they both will die because the rapier that each was cut with had been dipped in poison. Fortinbras finally arrives home and finds out that he will finally be king, but he is really sad about it because he was good friends with Hamlet. Hamlet tells Horatio to make sure everyone knows what happened to his family and what really went on so there will be no misinformation passed on to future generations.

Hamlet is one of the greatest theatrical characters that have ever been created. The character has different sides to him that make him hard to be understood.

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