

# The theme of fallen nation under the dead king in hamlet

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



## **Introduction**

More often than not authors come up with literary works that portray a true reflection of the society and times they live in. The Shakespearean play, Hamlet is no different, the text reflects context and paradigms that explore aspects of humanity that resonate through time and which stay relevant with time. The main themes in the play Hamlet is the fallen nation under the dead king. Denmark, in the play is seen as a nation that is right in the middle of disarray and one which is going through a number of societal ills. The theme of fallen nation under the dead king can be literal just like Hamlet's father or figurative representation of factors such as corruption, disease, poison, rot and deceit Claudius has. The theme is representative and relevant in today's society because a number of nations suffer from the ills that Denmark suffers from in Hamlet through a leader that is incapable or dictators that are corrupt. Many countries can be used as an example.

## **Claudius' Leadership**

In Elizabethan times the health of a nation was connected to the legitimacy of its king and this also applies in Hamlet. Claudius is viewed as the corrupt politician in the play based on the reactions of the people of Denmark. For example, in the first scene, people were anxious and were dreading the transfer of power to him from King Hamlet. This shows that they were not entirely comfortable with Claudius as the state's king. Denmark in the play is symbolized as a person that is healthy when it has a good king and dead when it has a bad king. In the play, the reign of Hamlet's father is seen as a healthy reign in Denmark because the dead king is portrayed as a good

ruler. In contrast, Claudius' reign is seen as a corrupt reign with a number of problems going on in the country. This comes up when the ghost of the dead king is seen, and the ghost is interpreted as a bad omen. "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (1. 4. 94). Therefore, Claudius portrays the state of the nation as a diseased body, one that is on the verge of corruption and deceit brought onto it by its leaders.

## **Special Vocabulary**

This theme is reinstated several times in the play through the use of vocabulary that focuses on diseases and illnesses which are symbolic because they refer to the overall state of the nation. Shakespeare makes use and adds the disease symbol into every scene of the play to symbolize the overall state of Denmark during Claudius' reign. Hamlet himself says the following words about the very air he is breathing, "a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors." (2. 2. 298) Hamlet also constantly refers to rot and corruption, often referring to the world he was in as an unweeded garden, "'Tis an unweeded garden That grows to seed." (1. 2. 135-136) and decomposing bodies. This indicates that there is something wrong with Denmark at the time, because it is on the risk of war against Norway and there is madness as in the case of Hamlet while having a king with no wit, Claudius. Therefore, the fallen nation under the dead king comes up as a theme because of the symbolism used in the play and direct references made of the state through the use of vocabulary that signifies corruption, madness and chaos.

## **Revenge**

Notably, the play Hamlet, focuses on revenge in a number of cases throughout the play. At no one point do the characters think about a truce or the impact of the revenge on the people they govern. The need for revenge by most of the characters shows the fallen nation under the dead king because its leaders are blinded by the thoughts of finishing their target. That is why Hamlet gave up everything including his love for Ophelia in order for the revenge. Also, in Act 1 Scene 1, the Ghost of dead king reappears a number of times and immediately the guards realize that it is seeking revenge for its death. Hamlet immediately agrees to avenge his father without thinking about the short/long term effects of the mission to the people of Denmark. Alternatively, Denmark is on the verge of a war due to King Hamlet slaying King Fortinbras, which also is brought on by the need for revenge by the young Fortinbras. The people in power in Denmark focus more on revenging their own personal vendettas as opposed to the consequences that the actions might bring to the people of Denmark, thereby indicating the fallen nation under the dead king because its leaders are not being wise with their eyes solely on revenge.

## **The Character of Hamlet**

Shakespeare utilizes the character of Hamlet with an aspect of symbolism, as the character of Hamlet develops all through the play, the theme of the fallen nation under the dead king also develops with the character of Hamlet. Upon Hamlet learning his of his father's death and that he was murdered by Claudius, and his mother's marriage to Claudius his character starts

changing. Hamlet develops a mental illness that affects him from the point of discovery to identifying himself to be tainted. Over time, Hamlet's character shows a lot of sickness and disease as a whole, as he engages in a number of revenge missions and plots to kill Claudius. Hamlet's character is symbolic to the State of Denmark and it refers to the instability that the nation was experiencing through corruption, revenge under bad leaders like Claudius. Therefore, Shakespeare makes use of the character of Hamlet to indirectly point out the chaos, disease and the rot that Denmark was experiencing during Claudius's rule.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the theme of fallen nation under the dead king comes up in numerous ways all throughout the play. The illegitimacy of Claudius' leadership and the anxiety of the society due to his ruling shows that they were not comfortable with him as king. This is important because in Elizabethan times, the legitimacy of a king affected the health of the nation. Secondly, the appearance of the ghost of the dead king further shows that something was seriously wrong in Denmark. Additionally, the vocabulary used by Shakespeare symbolizes a society in a state of disarray and chaos. Shakespeare's use of literary elements in the play contributes to the development of this theme. This theme paints a reflection of the society in a number of ways by questioning how the quality of leadership in the society affect its well being and whether that can be solved by improving the quality of leaders elected.