

Literature review on hamlet and today's society

Literature, William Shakespeare



One of the reasons why William Shakespeare's tragic play Hamlet remains such a popular work of literature, both for dramatic representation in its original form as well as for adaptation into more modern contexts, is that the themes and events in the play reflect truths about humanity that remain accurate in modern times. There are still taboo relationships that should not take place, at least according to the majority opinion among humanity; there are still times when it is difficult to know just when to take drastic action; and try as we may, it is still impossible to separate sex from emotion in a healthy way. These three themes are at work in Hamlet - as well as in our own time. Perhaps the most shocking piece of information that the audience receives in Hamlet is that a man killed his brother - and then married his brother's wife a short time later. It is true that, in the Old Testament, a brother was expected to marry his brother's widow if she had not yet had children, but here that protective relationship is turned on its head. Claudius murders the elder Hamlet while he is taking a nap and then takes Gertrude as his own. If you turn on any of the reality television shows today that go through the lives of different families, even the thought that someone would take up with the former spouse or partner of a family member is treated with disdain and scorn - and even anger. If one adds murder to this, then you have the sort of shocking taboo relationship that most people would scorn - and many people would watch on television. This was entertainment during the Elizabethan age, and it is entertainment today.

Hamlet spends a lot of time trying to decide on the right time to avenge the death of his father. President Obama receives a great deal of criticism, at times, for not seeming like a leader who can move quickly and with vision.

He spends a lot of time forming commissions and asking Congress to make decisions for the nation, instead of spending more time pushing his own ideas and asking Congress to accept them. Whether it is the job market or the economy or the handling of gun control after the Sandy Hook massacre, there are many people who feel that the president is not decisive enough. Hamlet's hand-wringing as he wrestles with the choice to murder his uncle or not can be seen as an even more tragic version of this stalling.

The relationship between Ophelia and Hamlet shows the corrosive effects of trying to separate sex from emotion. It is clear, from the events of the play, that Hamlet has used Ophelia's love for him in order to gain sexual gratification; afterward, though, he turns on her and refuses to show her any more affection. This leads to her madness and ultimate suicide. This idea that sex and emotion can be separate is a fascination in our own time, as movies like *Friends with Benefits* demonstrate. There is a degree of curiosity as to whether this separation can happen; over and over again, though we determine that it cannot happen in a healthy way.

The themes at work in *Hamlet* still dominate our discourse today, in a number of ways. This sort of thematic consistency is what makes works like this stand the test of time and remain popular for centuries.

Works Cited

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. London: Folger Shakespeare Library, c2005.