

Hamlet: the victim of a corrupt world

Literature, William Shakespeare



Victim of a Corrupt World Troubled by royal treason, ruthless scheming, and a ghost, Denmark is on the verge of destruction. Directly following King Hamlet's death, the widowed Queen Gertrude remarried Claudius, the King's brother. Prince Hamlet sees the union of his mother and uncle as a "hasty and incestuous" act (Charles Boyce, 232). He then finds out that Claudius is responsible for his father's treacherous murder. His father's ghost asks Hamlet to avenge his death and Hamlet agrees. He plans very carefully, making sure that he doesn't kill Claudius when he has already been forgiven for his sins. Hamlet accidentally kills Polonius, the King's advisor, thinking that it was Claudius hiding behind a curtain spying on Hamlet and his mother. This drives Ophelia, Polonius' daughter and Hamlet's love interest, insane. She then drowns in a suspected suicide when she falls from a tree into a river. Laertes, Ophelia's brother, teams up with Claudius and plot revenge on the strained prince. Hamlet agrees to a sword match with Laertes not knowing that Laertes will have a sharp, poisoned sword while he will be given a blunted sword. To make sure that their plan to kill Hamlet works, Claudius poisoned a drink to give to Hamlet but Gertrude ends up drinking it causing their plan to unravel. Laertes then wounds Hamlet with the poisoned sword, but in the scuffle they exchange weapons and Hamlet slices Laertes with the toxic blade. He then slashes Claudius with the poisoned blade and forces him to drink from the toxic cup. The four of them die but with his dying breath, Hamlet pleads with Horatio not to drink from the cup so he can tell his tragic story and announces Fortinbras as the King of Denmark. In this tragic story, Hamlet is a deeply sensitive man, too good and too noble to cope with or remain in the wicked world in which he finds

himself. According to the prince, the whole world is corrupt, he disowns life by saying, " How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable/ Seem to me all the uses of this world! . . . things rank and gross in nature/ Posses it merely" (William Shakespeare, 29). He also states " I have of late . . . lost all my mirth and this goodly frame the earth seems to me a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy the air . . . appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours" (William Shakespeare, 101), further expressing his hate for the world. The play's world provides the prince with real, not fantasized, parental conflicts: his father is dead, and he is the enemy of his mother's lover (Charles Boyce, 232) Hamlet is deeply disturbed with his mother's hasty decision to marry Claudius. He is appalled by his mother's willingness to accept an inferior man, a libertine and a murderer (Charles Boyce, 232). His disgust with life turns, therefore, to a revulsion against sex, the mechanism of life's continuance. Hamlet feels that his mother and uncle sleeping together, is foul and unnatural. He is obsessed with the image of his mom's ' incestuous sheets' (Shakespeare, 31) (Charles Boyce, 232). He transfers his mother's sexual guilt to Ophelia (Charles Boyce, 232). His mother sees nothing wrong with remarrying and ignores her son's feelings thinking that he's still mourning his father's death. The murder of his father also corrupted Hamlet's world. When his father's ghost came to him and told him that Claudius is the cause of his death, Hamlet vowed to get revenge for his father's painful death. Like incestuous marriage, murder between brothers is foul and unnatural. Not only did Claudius seduce Hamlet's mother before marrying her and robbed Hamlet form the throne of Denmark(Kronenberger, viii), he killed Hamlet's father by pouring poison in

his ear, causing his blood to curdle and his skin to scale with a rash. With his father dead and his mother remarried to his enemy, Hamlet had no one to turn to for help; therefore he is totally a victim of circumstance. Hamlet is a very smart and plotted very carefully. He was a good scholar and his plans never failed. To make sure that Claudius was really responsible for his father's death, Hamlet hires a group of traveling actors to perform "The Mousetrap" for the royal audience. The play closely mirrors the murder of King Hamlet so the prince and Horatio study Claudius' reaction for signs of guilt. After the play Hamlet was sure that Claudius was guilty and was then plotting his next move. Claudius then prays for forgiveness and Hamlet nearly slaughters the kneeling king but he stops when he remembers that a soul killed in the midst of prayer will go to heaven. This was a wise choice because he had the perfect opportunity but knew that it wouldn't be revenge as he explains in his speech "Now might I do it pat . . ." (Shakespeare, 167). He also fakes insanity to disguise his motive. This shows that Hamlet has self-control, good judgment and makes wise decisions. Hamlet was very popular and well-liked. For this reason, Claudius was not able to have him executed in Denmark and had to discretely send him to England. Hamlet was smart enough to change the names in the letter that Claudius had sent, from his to Claudius' spies. This had spared him his life and he was able to return back to Denmark. Hamlet also had romantic side that he didn't really show too much in the play. He cries to Ophelia and his rejection of her stems from his rejection of sex. Shakespeare did not intend their relationship as a love story: instead, it is an allegory of the condemnation of life, a point of view whose ultimate rejection is central to the play (Charles Boyce, 237).

However, when Hamlet is in the grave yard and realizes whose funeral he is witnessing, he rushes forth and tries to fight Laertes, challenging his position as chief mourner (Charles Boyce, 236). During the fight, Hamlet exclaims " I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers could not with all their quantity of love make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her?"(Shakespeare 255).

Ophelia's funeral triggers a last explosion of emotion as Hamlet assaults Laertes but . . . as he challenges Laertes, Hamlet declares himself ' Hamlet the Dane'(Shakespeare 255) (Charles Boyce, 233). This proves that Hamlet did love Ophelia but denied because of his hate and disgust with sex but it showed when he was at her funeral and also made him realize his loyal duties. Throughout the play, Hamlet had many distractions and delays do to the ones around him but he always knew that he had to stay noble to his father and get his revenge. Though committed to the idea that revenge is his duty, Hamlet senses the evil in the obligation, sent from ' heaven to hell' (Shakespeare, 119), and he resists (Charles Boyce, 233). Hamlet is a good person who does not want to commit sin, so he is torn apart between his father's vengeance and his own soul. Later on, he acknowledges that he cannot carry out the revenge called for by the Ghost without committing murder, the very crime he must avenge. He accepts that he must be evil in order to counter evil (Charles Boyce, 233). Hamlet decides to keep his word and fulfill his duties and kills Claudius. He had every right to do this especially after he found out that Claudius and Laertes were planning on killing him, and also when his mom dies from the poison that was supposed to be for him. The ending of the play was truly a tragic one because Hamlets life only got worse as the play went on. First his father is murder and then his

mother marries his uncle who turns out to be responsible for King Hamlet's death. He then kills Polonius causing Ophelia to become insane and eventually causing her to die, suicidal or not. Then his mother gets poisoned and dies and so does Laertes who he makes peace with. He got his wish fulfilled by killing the King but at the expense of all his loved ones. He showed compassion for the people dearest to him and that made him a good person. However, Hamlet was unable to deal with the harsh realities of life; as a result, he paid a tragic penalty. Works Cited Boyce, Charles Shakespeare A to Z 1991, Dell Publishing Kronenberger, Louis and William Shakespeare Hamlet: " A Riddle in Greatness" 1965, Hought Mifflin Company Shakespeare, William Hamlet 1992, Washington Square Press