

Theme of guilt in hamlet and fifth business

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There is one human emotion that can paralyse us, lead us to lie both to ourselves and others, to commit actions that we don't endure, and to cripple any rational thought processes. It is self-perpetuating if allowed to get out of control. Its side effects are anger, aggressiveness, fear or reclusiveness. Its symptoms are irrational behaviour, lying, anguish, and lack of self-esteem. It is the strong emotion that can affect our conscience, like an acid drop it corrodes the soul within and in extreme conditions it demolishes one's life, it is better known as guilt.

Guilt is a reoccurring theme in Robertson Davies' *Fifth Business*, and William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, that is demonstrated by various characters including, Dunstable Ramsay, Paul Dempster, Hamlet and Claudius and this essay shall compare the theme of guilt between the two literatures. In the novel *Fifth Business*, guilt is a plague that has spread throughout the lives of Dunstan Ramsay, and Paul Dempster; both characters are drenched with guilt that was a result of a tragic incident caused by Percy Staunton Boyd when he threw the snowball and it "hit Mrs. Dempster on the back of the head." (Davies, 2).

Dunstan experiences guilt early on in his childhood, realizing it is him who ultimately caused the premature labour of Paul, "Nevertheless this conversation reheated my strong sense of guilt and responsibility about Paul." (Davies, 136). As the guilt overtakes his life, Dunstan compares what he is feeling to what dying feels like and questions whether that would be better than dealing with this overwhelming guilt: "Ah, if dying were all there was to it! Hell and torment at once, but at least you know where you stand. It is living with these guilty secrets that exacts the price" (Davies, 19).

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Born prematurely, Paul Dempster was convicted of being guilty as he was responsible for robbing his mother of her sanity, as explained to him by his father, Amasa Dempster, " My father always told me it was my birth that robbed her of her sanity. So as a child I had to carry the weight of my mother's madness as something that was my own doing. " (Davies, 148). Moreover Paul was forced to feel the guilt at a young age, causing him to become frustrated, and that is when he decides to escape from Deptford and runs away with Le grand Cirque forain des St. Vite (Davies, 148), " He was my only teacher till I ran away with a circus. " (Davies, 265). Equivalently in the play Hamlet, the theme of guilt was developed through Hamlet and his most hateful enemy, King Claudius.

Hamlet experiences guilt when he recognizes that he has not yet avenged his father's death and in Act I Scene ii Hamlet reveals that he is upset and disappointed with himself, as he has not taken any actions to attain revenge from Claudius, the murderer of his father. Hamlet then calls himself, " a peasant slave" and questions, " What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, That he should weep for her? What would he do, Had he motive and cue for passion That I have? " (Shakespeare, II, ii, 529. 38-541). Furthermore, Hamlet later decides to relief his overwhelming guilt by commanding the actors to re-enact his father's death through The Murder of Gonzago, (Shakespeare, III, ii, 284), in order to confirm that the ghost was being truthful and Claudius did kill his father, " May be the devil, and the devil hath power T' assume a pleasing shape. Yea, and perhaps Out of my weakness and my melancholy, As he is very potent with such spirits, Abuses me to

damn me. I'll have grounds More relative than this. The play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king. " (Shakespeare, II, ii, 561- 567).

Eagerly wanting the throne Claudius murdered his brother, King Hamlet by poisoning him when he was sleeping in the garden, " He poisons him i' th' garden for' s estate. " (Shakespeare, III, ii, 246); his crime was soon revealed by the intelligent Hamlet, when he ordered the actors to create a play outlining the murder of King Hamlet, " Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue. "(Shakespeare, III, ii, 190-191). Claudius provoked and disturbed from the play, orders for it to be stopped, " Give o'er the play. " (Shakespeare, III, ii, 253) and leaves the scene, " The king rises. (Shakespeare, III, ii, 250) as his dirty crime is now evident. Devoured with the guilt of killing his brother, Claudius confesses and prays to God, hoping that it will cost him less time in Purgatory, " Oh, my offence is rank. It smells to heaven. It hath the primal eldest curse upon 't, A brother's murder. Pray can I not. Though inclination be as sharp as will, My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent, And, like a man to double business bound, I stand in pause where I shall first begin, And both neglect. " (Shakespeare, III, ii, 37-44). Silent yet deadly, its side effects are anger, aggressiveness or fear and reclusiveness.

Its symptoms are irrational behaviour, lying, anguish, and lack of self-esteem. It is the strong emotion that can affect our conscience, like an acid drop it corrodes the soul within and in extreme conditions it demolishes one's life, it is better known as guilt. The theme of guilt is an important reoccurring phenomenon in Robertson Davies' Fifth Business, and William

Shakespeare's Hamlet, as demonstrated by a number of characters including, Dunstable Ramsay, Paul Dempster, Hamlet, and Claudius, and this essay compared the theme of guilt between the two literatures.