

Disease, decay and poison in hamlet

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



William Shakespeares Hamlet has been considered the best catastrophe to have actually ever been composed, in which the theme of disease, decay and poison is embedded deep within the popular plot of the play. Such theme is established through the actions, dialogues and metaphorical language of the characters. These morbid images that are integrated not just help the audience in comprehending Hamlets real feeling, but also play a significant function in characterization, plot advancement and metaphorical message of the play.

Ideas about death and physical decay continuously repeat in much of the imagery in Hamlet not just in order to depict the character advancement and communicate Hamlets true emotions to the audience, but also to work as a metaphorical message on a larger scale.

For circumstances, the imagery of decay is used to assist understand the depression Hamlet feels in his first soliloquy about suicide: O that this too sullied flesh would melt, thaw, and fix itself into a dew (l.

ii 129-130), followed by his comparison of the world to an unweeded garden. This is the first time that Hamlet unleashes his ideas on the circumstance and develops a visualization of death. Hamlet therefore interacts with the audience putting strong emphasis on his desire not to exist in this world anymore. A picture of Hamlets flesh rotting is produced, followed by a photo of a stunning garden damaged by dreadful weeds that will ruin the good life.

At this moment the audience can grasp Hamlets real emotions as they have the ability to feel the pain and his yearn for death. Therefore, the genuine images about the method Hamlet feels is produced. In addition, when

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Laertes comes to the castle to get details on his fathers murder, the hysterical Ophelia pretends to provide him various flowers that represent something, however when she comes to the violets, which resembles faithfulness, she states that they have all withered when my daddy died (IV. v 182). In this quote, the images of decay is present because both her dad and the flowers have actually died.

This quote is significant to the play as a whole as it is a metaphorical image of corruption and moral decay plaguing not only the characters, but the whole area of Denmark as well, thus foreshadowing the eventual collapse of the nation. This metaphor once again appears in the dialogue when Marcellus states: Something is rotten in the state of Denmark (I. iv. 100), thus foreshadowing the corrupt nature of Denmark leading to the breakdown of the royal family. Therefore, Shakespeares references to death and decay clearly reveal Hamlets desperate state of mind, simultaneously serving as a political metaphor which implies that the whole state is rotting.

Another significant recurring image throughout Hamlet is poison., which plays a significant role in plot development. Poison is also an important theme in the play, which is the main instrument of death. A seminal death image, which brings about the first and most important murder in the play, is the poisoning of Old Hamlet, directed deliberately by his uncle as he lies sleeping in his orchard. Sleeping within my orchard, my custom always of the afternoon, upon my secure hour thy uncle stole, with juice of cursed hebona in a vial, and in the porches of my ears did pour the leprous distilment,

whose effect holds such an enmity with blood of man that swift as quicksilver it courses through the natural gates and alleys of the body (I. v. 66-75)

The audiences thus run into poison when we learn about the death of King Hamlet, who was killed by his brother pouring poison into his ear. The mention of poison holds a great amount of significance as it is used as a device that leads Hamlet to contemplate revenge upon Claudius. During the players reenactment of the crime in the later plot, the poison poured into Old Hamlets ear reappears. The recurring imagery of poison can be interpreted as a metaphorical message throughout the play as poison is being poured into ears in the form of gossip, suggestions of revenge, slander, evil thoughts that spreads sickness and disease upon the entire court of Denmark.

Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane, drink off this potion Follow my mother (V, 11, 302-304). Eventually, Hamlet mom Gertrude is killed by a poisonous drink, which is followed by Hamlet, Claudius, Laertes who are also killed by the poisonous rapier. The use of irony and retributive justice in the play becomes apparent when Claudius uses poison to kill King Hamlet and in the end, the same poison kills him, as well as his wife, Laertes and Hamlet. After all, it is the use of poison that starts the story and unravels the denouement, thus possessing an important role in plot development.

The somber and dark images of sickness and disease are constantly brought up in Hamlet, and shadow the corruption pervading the recent and future events of the castle. Throughout such images, Shakespeare succeeds in creating an atmosphere of cold and desolated darkness. Early in the first scene, when Francisco and Barnardo are standing watch, Francisco says: Tis

better cold, and I am sick at heart? (I. i. 8-9). Franciscos sickness foreshadows the sickness which is entering Denmark. The sickness in Denmark continues when Horatio is contemplating the reasons for the ghosts appearance. Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse? (I. i. 132). Horatio is describing the conditions in Rome just before the murder of Julius Caesar and he believes that the appearance of the Ghost is a portent to Denmark, as the sick moon was a portent to Rome. These quotes are significant because they create an ominous atmosphere for the entire play.

In Hamlets first soliloquy, he says: Things rank and gross in nature, possess it merely? (I. ii. 140-141). Hamlet apparently feels that the whole world is diseased. The sickness motif plays a significant role in the characterization of Hamlet, as it is extended with questions of Hamlets mental health as the story progresses. Hamlets dialogues related sickness and disease throughout the play reflects not only the outward condition which causes Hamlets spiritual illness, but also his own state. Indeed, the shock of the discovery of his fathers murder and the sight of his mothers conduct have had a traumatic effect on Hamlet to the extent that when the play opens he has already begun to die internally, as all the springs of life are being gradually infected. Therefore, it is necessary to notice the repetitive use of phrases related to sickness and disease in the dialogues, for it creates an ominous atmosphere throughout the play and further aids in the character development of Hamlet.

In conclusion, the theme of disease, decay and poison is important throughout the play as it is incorporated with the aim of revealing Hamlets

state of mind, conveying political messages, and adding greater significant to the plot development and characterization. Shakespeare successfully achieved his goal through utilizing the dominant theme of the play. As a result, the play has been making a long-lasting impression on the audiences.

Bibliography

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