

Major themes in shakespeare's hamlet

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William Shakespeare's prominent role in English literature is accountable to his ability to reflect and challenge matters substantial to humanity; provoking the reverberation of similar feelings in the human psyche. The revenge-tragedy Hamlet, being the most examined and decoded text of Shakespeare's, implements several elements that contribute to strengthening the revenge plots by the characters of Hamlet and Laertes.

The thematic concepts of mortality and verisimilitude are key principles in shaping Hamlet as a character motivated to take advantage of his toilsome relationships and problematic fellow characters, in order to carry out his revenge. Mortality is a pivotal theme throughout Hamlet. Its role in revenge is immediately addressed in the presence of the ghost of Hamlet's father, King Hamlet. The appearance of the ghost displayed inconsistency with the beliefs of the audiences of Elizabethan times as the concept of purgatory was against Protestantism, the commonly accepted religion in Elizabethan England. The serpent that did sting thy father's life/ Now wear his crown" is a biblical allusion to the snake from Adam and Eve to blatantly expose the blasphemous deeds of Claudius. The ghost urges Hamlet to avenge his death in order to " Let not the royal bed of Denmark be a couch for luxury and damned incest", referring to Gertrude's lustful motives in her quick resilience to marry Claudius thereafter King Hamlet's death. Patriarchal discourse hints at Shakespeare's misogynous perspectives, and is implemented to insinuate that the mortality of King Hamlet has augmented the effect of his ability to influence Hamlet to seek vengeance.

Mortality not only sparks Hamlet's revengeful ambition, but his contemplation upon mortality thwarts his attempts to kill Claudius. Recurring

suicidal thoughts are evident in his first soliloquy in Act 1 Scene 2, wishing that God “ had not fix'd his canon ' gainst self-slaughter! ” The mortal sin of suicide is proposed to the audience, which would have diverged from Christian mores. The employment of exclamatory language and exaggerated characterisation of Hamlet's over-stimulated intellect presents the audience with a hamartia.

S. T. Coleridge addresses this fatal flaw of Hamlet, believing that he “ vacillates from sensibility, and procrastinates from thought, and loses the power of action in the energy of resolve”. The famous “ to be, or not to be” soliloquy also exhibits Hamlet's suicidal thoughts and their role in stunting his retribution. Enlightenment values are present in the metaphor where he attempts to reason with himself “ Whether ' tis nobler in the mind to suffer... or to take arms against a sea of troubles”.

Hamlet's questioning of the righteousness of life over death exposes his insecurity with mortality and provokes the audience to reflect upon their own morality in terms of suicide. Shakespeare's use of verisimilitude is evident in Hamlet's first revenge tactic “ To put an antic disposition on” in Act 1 Scene 5. The feigning of madness thereby increases anticipation for avenging his father's murder, and also creates dramatic irony in confusing Claudius and Polonius to think that these fits are due to “ the very ecstasy of love”.

Hamlet's Machiavellian tactics are again utilized in his second scheme of verisimilitude where the technique of mise-en-abyme forestalls the climax of the play. Hamlet's “ mouse-trap” play “ Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king” re-enacts the ghost's description of Claudius' murderous ways and his incestuous marriage to Gertrude soon after, provoking a wild reaction

from Claudius that confirmed his liability for King Hamlet's death. Dramatic irony is emphasised through alliteration when Hamlet tauntingly asks "What, frightened with false fire?" as Claudius rises to leave.

The imperative "Give me some light. Away!" incorporates exclamatory language to express Claudius' fear of exposure as a murderer to the kingdom, thus threatening his place in Denmark's aristocracy. It is thus insinuated that Hamlet's revenge operation is working as Claudius is now in a vulnerable position, and is consequently threatened by Hamlet. Verisimilitude has benefited Hamlet in being the tool for him to carry out his revenge plots, as well as counteracting his process of vengeance; undertaken his procrastination of action or by having it being used against him.

Claudius' murder is adjourned by Hamlet as he is found inside of the king's private chapel attempting to reconcile his sins with god. "Oh my offence is rank, it smells to heaven" uses sensory imagery to evoke Claudius' strong suffering from guilt, revealing Machiavellian elements in his self-serving nature. The falsely assumed state of prayer thus provokes Hamlet's introspection "I, his sole son, do this same villain send to heaven"; an epiphany that exposes his murderous scheme as an unworthy form of revenge and thus once again defers his vengeance.

Claudius' unintentional verisimilitude augments Hamlet's hubris in wanting a prodigious vengeance for his father, in which Hamlet's mind is described by T. S. Eliot as "naturally of the creative order, but which through some weakness in creative power exercises itself in criticism instead". Verisimilitude then becomes an intended use of manipulation by Claudius to

carry out his own sub-plot for Hamlet's death, but stating to Laertes that the motive is to "Requite him for your father".

Laertes feels condoned to commit the mortal sin of cutting Hamlet's "throat i'th'church" as Claudius uses Machiavellian politics to take advantage of Laertes' vulnerability quickly thereafter the death of his father, Polonius. An element of subterfuge is then implemented in Laertes' purpose to "anoint my sword", using a poisoned sword as a sub-plot of verisimilitude to carry out his own vengeance for his father in the duel against Hamlet. Mortality and verisimilitude are distributed evenly throughout the play Hamlet in order to engage audiences with Hamlet's systematic pursuit of revenge.

The characterisation of Hamlet being so immersed in his own realm of thoughts stunts his mission for vengeance. This is in stark contrast to the characterisation of Claudius being a Machiavellian sociopath that takes whatever action he needs to in order to succeed. Thus, it is justified that Hamlet was not only the cause of his own demise, but also the cause of further disruption in the Chain of Being. Therefore, this revenge-tragedy would lack textual integrity without the thematic concepts of mortality and verisimilitude.