

# Psychoanalytic criticism: hamlet as a victim of oedipus complex

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The psychoanalytic concept Oedipus complex refers to the emotions and psychosexual desires during the phallic stage in the developmental process, which a boy child possesses towards his mother creating a parallel sense of rivalry towards the father (Liu and Wang 1420). The psychological complex was introduced by Freud with the term being derived from the character in Greek folklore, Oedipus, who unintentionally slew his father and subsequently married his mother (Liu and Wang 1420). Freud asserted that the complex manifests in children at a young age but ends with the child identifying with the parent of the same sex hence repression of carnal instincts. However, Freud analyzed further that the suppressed yearnings of the subconscious manifest in later years dictating the child's behavior. Freud analysis of Hamlet with his psychological theory argued that the titular character's behavior and decisions are subconsciously driven by Oedipus complex. In the play, Hamlet is demonstrated as unveiling the traits of the complex through his possessiveness over his mother. According to Freud, the portrayal of Hamlet's relationship and his mother has also shown repressed sexual desires and connotations that resemble the oedipal complex philosophy. Furthermore, Hamlet's reluctance and procrastination to avenge his father's death has been attributed to the concept of rivalry or opposition towards the father in the theory. Hamlet is a victim of Oedipus complex due to his hesitancy to take revenge and his repressed psychosexual fondness and fixation towards his mother.

Hamlet's reluctance and indecision to avenge his father's murder is an indication of Oedipus complex. Hamlet's obligation seems to be all forgotten on his return home and does not exhibit any indication of planning to murder

Claudius. The reason for Hamlet's hesitance to abide by his father's command to avenge his death is Hamlet's subconscious gratitude to Claudius for murdering his father (Rashkin 24-25). According to the Freudian concept, Hamlet suffers from deep-rooted aspects of the complex hence still exhibits rivalry towards the father and wishes to replace him. The play is about Hamlet's seeking revenge but there are no clear reasons for his indecision to kill Claudius. Hamlet's consciousness is heavily under conflict due to the fact that he is obligated to undertake the revenge but is also secretly glad about his father's death. Jacques Lacan argued using the Freudian concept and indicated that Hamlet's melancholy and reluctance to kill Claudius is because he views Claudius as a reflection of his repressed oedipal self (Rashkin 25). Hamlet still retains his oedipal instincts and desires and because Claudius was able to kill Hamlet Sr. and sleep with Gertrude, Hamlet lives his oedipal fantasy through him. Hamlet's decision to finally murder Claudius comes in Act 5 which is a long period after discovering he is his father's murderer. In Scene III, Hamlet kills Claudius with no hesitation only after the death of his mother Gertrude. Hamlet's reluctance was associated with his repressed desires towards Gertrude and due to her death, his oedipal instincts died too hence had no inhibitions anymore. Moreover, Hamlet's oedipal instincts are also exhibited through his hatred of Claudius and Gertrude's relationship.

Hamlet's anger and jealousy towards Claudius and his marriage to his mother illustrate Hamlet as a victim of Oedipus complex. Hamlet demonstrates hostility and hatred towards Claudius because of his hastened

nuptial to his mother. He views Gertrude's remarriage and affection to his uncle as revolting; in his first monologue he asserts "O, most wicked speed, to post/with such dexterity to incestuous sheets!" (Shakespeare 1. 2. 157-158). Due to his suppressed yearnings towards his mother, Hamlet experiences jealousy when Gertrude directs affection to any other man apart from him. He is shown as being concerned with his mother's remarriage more than his father's death. Hamlet's jealousy is fully exhibited when he scolds his mother in his chambers about her sexual deeds with Claudius and confesses his true feelings towards their marriage. Hamlet wishes to be the object of love and desire for his mother and not his uncle. His Oedipal instincts believe that he should be with his mother now that his father is now deceased (Jamwal 123). However, Claudius taking the position of his father which he subconsciously craves awakens rage and hatred towards him. In the third Act, when Hamlet stabs Polonius assuming it is Claudius, illustrates his desire to eliminate the 'father' figure for his mother's full affection which is a clear manifestation of Oedipus complex.

Hamlet's oedipal complex is apparent through the deep fondness for his mother and the frequent sexual allusions. In the third scene Hamlet converses to his mother in soliloquies that are filled with sexual inferences, he reproaches her of "...honeying and making love / Over the nasty sty!" (3. 4. 93-94). The Freudian concept asserts that sexual behavior and thought shapes a person's psychology and Hamlet's discourse is an exemplification. The strong sexual desires for his mother triggers his disgust and jealousy of the thought of sexual encounter between her and Claudius (Cameron 170).

Hamlet gets explicitly sexual in his words further into the conversation by obsessing over physical contact between Claudius and his mother. He also advises Gertrude to refrain from laying in bed with the king once and it will be easier to refuse his sexual advances in the future. Hamlet's obsession with his mother's carnal pleasures alludes to his unconscious sexual jealousy and desires that stem from the psychological complex.

Additionally, the nature of Ophelia and Hamlet's relationship is as a result of the unresolved oedipal feelings towards Gertrude. The unrequited love amid Ophelia and Hamlet is due to his unhealthy psychological bond with his mother (Jamwal 123). Hamlet never views Ophelia as a lover and does not express strong sexual or emotional attraction for her as it is subconsciously reserved for her mother. Hamlet's complex feelings for his mother are paralleled through Ophelia; He despises Ophelia for being obedient to his father Polonius as it subconsciously reminds him of Gertrude's submission to Claudius (Cameron 175). His Oedipal instincts do not allow Hamlet to express affection to another woman and he only uses Ophelia as a target for outbursts and frustrations he has towards his mother.

In the play, Hamlet is evidently a victim of the Oedipus complex as reflected through his behaviors and decisions throughout. According to the Freudian concept, the boy child's behaviors are dictated by the repressed psychosexual desire and emotions towards the mother. The point of focus in the play is Hamlet's obligation to avenge his father's death which only takes place after a series of internal conflicts. The theme of indecision can only be linked to Hamlet's unresolved oedipal feelings and instincts. His reluctance in

taking revenge is attributed to his mental conflict between his obligation and the oedipal instinct to exult his father's death. More explicit indications of Hamlet's psychological complex is his hatred and disgust of his mother's quick remarriage to Claudius. He obsesses about Gertrude's decision to marry and engage in sexual activities with him and relentlessly rebukes her for it. A child's fixation with the parent's sexual life is an unusual endeavor and can only be explained through the concept of Oedipus complex. Lastly, Hamlet's complex relationship with Ophelia is a clear reflection of the suppressed sexual feelings and the unnatural psychological bond with his mother.

## **Works Cited**

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