

Emotions and logic in hamlet

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



One of the many talents of Shakespeare is how well he can portray the complexity of a character. He perfectly captures how complicated people can be, while maintaining the story driven aspects of a character. For example, in Hamlet, the title character is captivating because he is complicated. Shakespeare portrays Hamlet as emotionally driven, yet logical.

Hamlet is a very emotional and impulsive character. The relationship he has with his mother is a great example of this. Despite his obvious reasoning in being upset with his mother for marrying Claudius shortly after King Hamlet's death, Hamlet is still unnecessarily flippant and belittling towards her, annoying her to the point of asking, "What have I done, that thou darest wag thy tongue in noise so rude against me?" (Shakespeare). He also frustrates and out-smarts Polonius with his responses, who exclaims, "How pregnant sometimes his replies are!" (Shakespeare, Act II, 211). He also says that Hamlet bears a happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be delivered of" (Shakespeare, Act II, 212-214). The reader is shown through Hamlet's interactions with other characters that he is a cynical and pessimistic character. His pessimism will influence his future decisions and perceptions of events.

Despite the force of his emotion, Hamlet is also logical and almost fixated on the details of his problems. For instance, although Hamlet believes instinctively that Claudius murdered his father, he goes to great lengths to investigate his suspicion in order to confirm it, and he sets up an elaborate ruse that is intended to provoke the revelation of Claudius's guilt. The play's "the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king," he says at the end of Act II, Scene II (Shakespeare). The play that Hamlet arranges is cleverly

designed and he has a maniacal sense of purpose and attention to detail. He tells the actors to convey the authenticity of their characters, issuing the directive that they should, as stated in one of the important quotes from Hamlet by William Shakespeare, Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you./Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand,/for/in the very torrent, tempest, and/the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness” (II. i. 1-2; 5-10). Still, even his seemingly singular dedication to bringing the play to the stage is not entirely straightforward.

Hamlet is deeply conflicted about the choices he is making to avenge his father’s death. In a moving monologue, Hamlet pauses and takes the time to examine his motives and his very character: I am pigeon-liver’d and lack gall/Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,/That I Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with/ words,/And fall a-cursing, like a very drab, a scullion!” (II. ii. 602; 611-617). Yet just before the play begins, Hamlet is giddy with anxiety and anticipation, as Ophelia notes: You are merry, my lord” (III. ii. 128). In sum, one of the most interesting and compelling aspects of Hamlet as a tragic character is that he is not quite sure who he is and spends the play working on developing a sense of self a difficult task given his circumstances. Clearly, Hamlet is still in the process of learning about his own complex identity, and is struggling with self-acceptance. At the time of his death, he has not fully resolved or accepted these complexities. In fact, it is his uncontrolled behavior and failure to resolve his emotions that precipitates his own death.

Hamlet also recognizes the complexity of other characters. He helps the reader, albeit in an indirect manner, to see these complexities. In fact, Hamlet may be even more successful in recognizing others' multi-faceted nature than accepting his own, with the notable exceptions of his mother and Claudius, for whom he can only feel a singular disgust. When confronted by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern about the King's and Queen's reaction to the play, Hamlet affirms that he lack[s] advancement" in understanding his own troubles. However, there are many examples of Hamlet's acknowledgment of others' complexity. When Horatio praises Hamlet's father as a goodly king," (I. ii. 187), for instance, Hamlet, who did respect his father deeply, replies, He was a man, take him for all in all" (I. ii. 188). Unfortunately, Hamlet lacks the ability, and never develops it, to turn such insight inwards.

It is not unusual for characters in literary works to appear more one-dimensional than people in real life actually are. Authors often develop a character type as a means of exploring a particular human quality, whether this type is positive or negative. The different character types are then situated within a physical and temporal setting and a plot, and are cast against one another with the purpose of eliciting the reader's empathy or disapproval, thereby conveying moral or social lessons to the reader. Although this technique of character development is often successful, it can also be limiting.

As this thesis statement for Hamlet suggests, one of Shakespeare's many achievements was creating characters who were complex and believable,

even though their lives and circumstances are so distinct from those of the contemporary reader. Rather than reduce his players to a single character type, Shakespeare trusted that the reader could, along with the character, explore the shallows and depths of each person's complexity. In doing so, the reader gains an appreciation not only for the full range of feeling and experience in this work, but also in his or her own life.