

# Hamlet theme analysis

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



In William Shakespeare's tragedy Hamlet, the title character's logical soliloquies, and over thinking of situations inhibit his abilities to act on his passions. It's safe to say that Hamlet was a logical and reasonable person right from the start. In the society he was raised in most actions carried out through passion were considered taboo. Take jealousy, lust and vengeance for example; in the play all of these passions are put into satisfying action by the people surrounding Hamlet.

Everyone but Hamlet makes a move based on emotion; Claudius murdered his brother for his crown, Gertrude quickly married Claudius, and Laertes takes revenge on Hamlet. The prince, instead, takes the path of thought and only allows himself to do what he makes himself believe is the most logical.

In the beginning Hamlet is distressed. He feels no compassion for his new stepfather considering him " a little more than kin and less than kind" (I. ii. 67), as Claudius is not a replacement for his father and Hamlet refuses to accept that.

He most definitely does not stand for Claudius referring to him as ' son.'

His relationship with his mother isn't any better. Hamlet feels a strong resentment toward this whole marriage business and expresses his displeasure through riddles in court. " Ay, madam," he says disdainfully toward his mother's insistence that he stop mourning and that death is a common occurrence, " it is common" (I. ii 76). In Hamlet's eyes she has betrayed his father by marrying so soon, in fact by re-marrying at all; especially to Claudius, the king's brother.

Claudius attempts to make it look like everyone is friends in the eyes of the court by trying to sympathize with Hamlet but ends up just telling him to suck it up and deal with his father's death like a man. "Take it to heart? Fie! 'tis a fault to heaven/A fault against the dead, a fault to nature" (I. ii 104). Hamlet's mourning is not natural to his family much as their marriage is not natural to him. So when his new daddy dearest refuses to let him out of the country to go back to school Hamlet feels even more out of place because now, he can't escape.

In every soliloquy we hear from Hamlet there is talk of suicide. The most obvious of all, "to be or not to be, that is the question:" (III. i. 63) Or earlier mention of self harm after the coronation of the new king. "Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd/His canon 'gainst self-slaughter" (I. ii. 134).

However, Hamlet is a logical guy and he knows suicide would cause a big mess and besides, in the first soliloquy it is evident that Hamlet would rather be anywhere but Denmark, even the grave but he finds there are better things to be ranting about; like his mother's remarriage. "O God! a beast that wants discourse of reason/Would have mourn'd longer-married with my uncle,/My father's brother, but no more like my father/Than I to Hercules" (I. ii. 154). Hamlet can't find a single good thing to come out of this union and his opinion of his mother has been flipped onto its head. So he deals with an internal conflict; "But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue!" (I. ii. 162), he can't exactly go around telling everyone that his mother is a whore. She's the queen and he the prince, it would be more trouble than it's worth to go about making accusations especially since Claudius made it clear that

he was weird for mourning for so long. So, onward goes Hamlet's little self/Claudius loathing party.

Hamlet's trusted friend Horatio tells him some very interesting news. Horatio tells Hamlet that his father's ghost had been spotted in the courtyards and that it wouldn't answer to anyone no matter what. Horatio believes that our young prince must see what this ghost has to offer. Hamlet is excited to say the least when the ghost appears " That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee Hamlet, / King, father, royal Dane. O answer me!" (I. iv. 47). He follows the ghost and the ghost tells Hamlet that he was murdered by Claudius and that Hamlet must avenge him. He isn't sure what to make of this ghost at first, how can Hamlet be absolutely positive the ghost isn't lying or tricking him? After all, murder is a big order, he can't dive head first into that pool of accusations without verification.

Hamlet decides he will 'act' mad so to not draw attention to his plans to kill Claudius. This works for a while, no one suspects he knows of Claudius' deed, not even Claudius himself. He definitely wouldn't suspect the prince to come into his chambers and catch him while praying; which is exactly what happens. Hamlet is given his prey on a silver platter and decides against it. " Now might I do it pat, now he is praying; and now I'll do't. And so he goes to heaven" (III. iii. 76).

A reasonable explanation as to why Hamlet didn't kill Claudius is because he was scared. He was afraid to act on his passions thus, his mind gave him a reason not to do it; if he killed Claudius while the man repented, his soul would be unfailingly sent to heaven. However, this is not the case " That cannot be; since I am still possess'd / of those effects for which I did the

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murder”(III. iii. 55). Claudius does not regret his decision, nor would he leave what he had gained through murder even for heaven. This hesitation revealed that Hamlet does not kill Claudius in the most logical and perfect time to do so because his passions had muddied his ability to think clearly. And so he continues with his ‘ mad’ facade.

Everyone has noticed the prince’s new attitude and his mother grows worried for his sanity. “ Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended” (III. iv. 9) If there is anything ‘ crazy’ Hamlet has latched onto as a vehicle upon which to launch his insanity, it is any mention of his late father. Especially mention that he has somehow failed his father. The queen claims that Hamlet’s behavior has upset his father and shamed the family. But quick and clever Hamlet simply quips “ Mother you have my father much offended”(III. iv. 10).

Gertrude is appalled by her son’s behavior and wants him to stop, but bringing up the late King Hamlet wasn’t the best way to go around that. As I’ve said, Hamlet is using any mention of his father’s death to flip the tables around and around and drive any serious conversation off course with puns and quips of his mother’s hasty remarriage. “ Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue” (III. iv. 11). “ Go, go you question with a wicked tongue” (III. iv. 12).

At one point during the conversation between mother and son it is hard to determine where Hamlet’s insanity begins and his act of madness ends. We are given, throughout the entirety of the play, one single act of passion from Hamlet that was done to simply give a larger voice to his slip on sanity. His murder of Polonius. He feels no remorse for the act, although he believed it

to be Claudius and states after his mother's cries " A bloody deed. Almost as bad, good mother/as kill a king and marry with his brother" (III. iv. 31). He continues " Peace! sit you down/and let me wring your heart; for so I shall,/if it be made of penetrable stuff;"(III. iv. 38). Hamlet doesn't feel sorry for his mother either. He could care less if she was disturbed by her son's murder of Polonius, he was going to tell her that he was right and she was wrong and sinful and disgusting, because it fit with the appearance Hamlet was trying to portray.

Hamlet allowed this one, small, passionate outburst for the potential sake of avenging his father but even smart, logical Hamlet couldn't have predicted the consequences of this one act of passion because he didn't give himself the time to think it over. He never would have thought that their father's death would lead poor Ophelia to madness or that Laertes would be so spited by it, or that it would get around that Hamlet himself had committed the murder.

But all of these things do happen and they happen because of Hamlet's one moment of passion. The prince discovers why acting passionately is a bad thing for him; he's just not good at it. He can't judge when to, the whole ' could kill him now but I'm not going to even if it'd be so freaking easy,' thing with Claudius and the ' I'm gonna stab the curtain and see what happens,' moment when he murdered Polonius.

After Polonius' murder and the discovery by Laertes that his sister is beyond mental, Claudius approaches the boy and tells him he can help avenge his father's death. Laertes listens and latches to Claudius' every word " And

where the offence is let the great axe fall./I pray you go with me" (IV. v. 234).

The end of act four introduces a bit of a mess. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were sent with Hamlet to see him killed in England, however, Hamlet is on his way back to Elsinore and Claudius is none too pleased. However, he quickly turns this information into a plan he can work with. He has Laertes swear allegiance to him " will you be ruled by me?" (IV. vii. 63) and recruits the younger man into the ' let's kill Hamlet club.'

Thus, Hamlet finds himself in an unfortunate pickle. He had planned to kill Claudius and Laertes and they had planned to kill him, but Laertes acted sooner. Laertes let his passions guide his sword through Hamlet's gut and Hamlet let logic lead him to the moment of his death; logic led by the very vengeance he had sworn for the former king. A passionate vengeance called upon to give Laertes strength to murder the prince.

Hamlet's ability to look at a situation and make a logical, well- thought out choice made him a strongly intelligent character. However his inability to act on passions or make a decisive decision drew him closer to death in every page. Had Hamlet acted on his earlier plans and ideas, he may not be dead.