

How effectively does shakespeare use the language

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



No other writer in the world is so quotable or so often quoted as Shakespeare is. He expressed his deep thoughts and feelings in words of great beauty and power. In the technical skills of rhythm, sound, image and metaphor he remains the greatest of craftsmen. His range is immense. It extends from funny puns to lofty eloquence, from the speech of common men to the language of philosophers. His plays rose to fame and appreciation due to his extraordinary insight into human psychology. His ability to distinguish man in all forms and character is extraordinary.

This magnificent ability is shown through all his plays. Some of Shakespeare's famous tragic plays include Hamlet, Othello, Romeo and Juliet, Julius Caesar and Macbeth which not only captures our interest and wonder but teach us valuable lessons in life as well. Shakespeare's magic speech and fancy can be felt but not described. No one else has his wide variety, his warmth, his clear-cut vision of evil and his high regard for heroism. He believed that man could overcome the evil in himself. He once said, " we are mixtures of good and evil. " His characters have an astonishing reality.

Like real people, they can be great and yet foolish, bad and yet likable, good and yet faulty. Shakespeare's people are painted larger than life, hence making them complex and exciting. They have superhuman energy and grandeur, and stand for mankind in its greatest passions and powers, for good or for evil. William Shakespeare started writing tragedies because he thought the tragic plots used by other English writers lacked artistic purpose and form. His tragedies revolve around a person of social or intellectual

status whose life is ruined by great mistake or tragic flaw. According to Elizabethan philosophy there was a natural order in the universe ordained by God.

Everyone had an appointed place on earth headed by the King. God could raise individuals or lower them. But if an individual himself controlled or changed the natural order through evil or devious means, there would be confusion, conflict and chaos. The associated imagery would be of fear, sickness, decay, blood and evil. Contemporary audiences were impressed by frightening figures or supernatural creatures like witches and ghosts. In Hamlet the ghost of his father adds to the supernatural element in the play.

The play, which was written by Shakespeare around the turn of the seventeenth century is one of Shakespeare's best insights into the human mind. It revolves around a young prince named Hamlet who in a way represents man's nature as a whole. His deep philosophical mind is what captures the audience's interest. Hamlet portrays his inner turmoil through his soliloquies. He is a melancholy young man, who was ordered by the dead ghost of his father to avenge his murder. During the Elizabethan times drama was a usual pass-time for the general public. The audiences would gather around the stages and watch the play in an interactive sort of manner.

What captured the audience's interest in Hamlet were his complex thoughts about life and his many speculations. The use of question and philosophical language draws the audience into intense speculation about life, as Hamlet

relates his troubles and conflicts. The inner conflicts faced by him portray the life of many people faced even today. That is why Shakespeare is still so famous in the Twenty-First Century. What also captivated the audience was Shakespeare's extraordinary use of poetic language. He transports us into deep thoughts through his use of soliloquies.

Soliloquies were a literary tradition at that time and through the soliloquy's in Hamlet the audience got an insight and gained direct experience of Hamlet 's inner world. A kind of internal debate is portrayed through a soliloquy. It is a dramatic convention, which reveals the characters true thoughts and feelings. This technique was a very common attribute in plays at that time. Through soliloquy's Hamlet explores the contradictions facing him thus sustaining our intense interest into the play. In Shakespeare's time, audiences expected actors in tragedies to speak in verse.

The poetic style was thought to be particularly suitable for kings, great affairs of the state, tragic themes and moments of high dramatic or emotional intensity. Much of the language of Hamlet is blank verse: unrhymed verse written in iambic pentameter. This twist in the style of writing is what captured and mesmerized audiences when they saw the play. It was written in such a manner that it seemed more like a real conversation and with real situations rather than it being a play. So apart from it being a play for amusement, it also thought audiences many fundamental morals about life.

In Act 1 Scene 2, in his soliloquy, Hamlet shares with the audience his disgust at the conduct of the King and Queen. He tries to come to terms with the loss of his father and the indecent haste with which his mother had remarried a man so unlike his father- " That it should come to this, but two months dead... so excellent a king, that was to this... ". He is so distressed with the situation that he finds this whole experience so traumatic that he is even ready to commit suicide, but he realizes it is a mortal sin to do so- " O that this too too sullied flesh would melt... r that the Everlasting had not fixed his canon 'gainst self slaughter".

According to him the world is a tiresome, foul place populated only by " things rank on grass in nature" - " How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable seem to me all he uses of this world! ". This also shows us his weary state of mind. He is disillusioned and mentally disturbed at what is happening around him. We understand Hamlet's inner turmoil because of the way he expresses his feelings to us. Shakespeare's complex linguistic devices help us understand this. One such device is the use of 'repetition'.

Repetition is used throughout the play stressing on certain things that reveal Hamlet's character. The language is given great dramatic force as repeated words, phrase, rhythms and sounds add to the emotional intensity of a moment or scene, heightening theatrical effect- " O that this too too sullied flesh would melt... ". The repetition of the letter " T" stress on Hamlets desire to commit suicide. It also makes the scene much more dramatic and stresses on Hamlet's inner conflict. Through this technique we see just how bothered Hamlet was about the issue.

In other words Hamlet's feelings, importance of the matter and the audience's appreciation for the play are captured using only one linguistic device- showing to us Shakespeare's genius when it comes to writing plays. Long lists of adjectives are also used to intensify the various descriptions, atmosphere and arguments. Adjectives like " weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable... " all show us Hamlet's dislike of life itself in this world. He feels he has nothing to live for as he sees himself a coward unable to avenge his father. To also describe Hamlet's love for his father Shakespeare uses the technique of contrast- " Hyperion to a satyr... ".

Hamlet thinks his father is superhuman and the opposite of Claudius. He compares his father to Hyperion the sun god without a blemish, and he compares his uncle to a satyr, a mythological creature who was half man, half goat. This is an effective comparison between a mighty and powerful god to an insignificant and evil satyr. This creates a strong and vivid image in the audience, for the characters of the King and Claudius. Shakespeare very often compared his characters to certain mythological creatures and beings to bring them to life and make them more interesting, thus capturing the audience's interest and showing to them their characters.

He believed his father was " so loving to his mother". All this proves to us Hamlet's love and admiration for his father. He is so blinded by grief and anger for his mother's rush into marriage that he names all women as being weak- " Frailty, thy name is woman". As we come towards the end, we come across Hamlet's most dreadful weakness, " procrastination and lack of courage to express his feelings openly"- " But break, my heart, for I must

hold my tongue". Hamlets inability to express his feelings outwardly and indecisiveness is what we later discover leads to his downfall.

In his second soliloquy Hamlet expresses his feelings even further to the audience, revealing certain plots and emotions. In his first soliloquy he expressed his feelings about life, but here we see Hamlet as he lashes at himself or his flaws. His enthusiasm for the Hecuba speech, leads him to examining his present state of mind. Impressed by the striking passion of actor, " This player here... could force his soul so to his own conceit... " , Hamlet feels inadequate and ashamed for his delay in avenging his fathers death, " Why what an ass am I! .

He lashes out against himself for being a coward and hates himself for not taking any action when he has real proof to take revenge- " must like a whore unpack my heart with words and fall a cursing like a very drab". He admits to his flaws and condemns himself for it as he compares himself to a whore with no dignity. His ability to speak out words and inability to act infuriates him. This effective use of comparison is very appropriate to his feelings and situation, thus proving Shakespeare appropriate use of simile.

Shakespeare here uses the technique of introspection to examine Hamlets own mind. He asks himself a string of questions that take him further into examining his own mind but also stirs up new questions for him to answer, making him even more confused- " Am I a coward? Who calls me villain... Why does me this?... ". Out of frustration he blames Claudius for all that is encircling his mind. He condemns him to eternal hell and damns him- "

Bloody, bawdy villain! Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindles villain! ".
He uses a list of expressive adjectives to condemn Claudius.

Shakespeare always used a string a strong adjectives to stress on an issue and to bring out a strong and emphatic image. It helps the reader better understand the character and his/her feelings. This was a very effective device used by Shakespeare at that time. At the end of the soliloquy Hamlet reveals his plan to confirm Claudius was the murderer thus portraying the importance of this soliloquy. The play within the play would stir guilt and remorse in Claudius's mind- " The play's the thing wherein I'll I catch the conscience of the King. ", hence giving Hamlet motive to kill.

In his third soliloquy in Act 3, Scene 1 Hamlet once again brings out certain issues that cause him to be at conflict with himself. Compared with his last two soliloquy's, Hamlet here is much more philosophical and introspective. He asks himself whether it is more heroic to patiently bear the troubles of life or fight against it and in this way try to put an end to it, or in other words the advantages and disadvantages of suicide- " Whether, 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune or to take up arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them".

Shakespeare uses metaphors to stress and the issue. This is the case when he compares Hamlet's trouble to the sea, vast and huge. This creates a graphic image of the sea in the audiences mind, thus showing just how big a problem it was for Hamlet. This is what makes Shakespeare's plays o fascinating. His desire to commit suicide is blocked by his fear of death itself.

Hamlet in this soliloquy shows us that he has become a detached person. He is unable to avenge his father. In this soliloquy there are no uses of " I" or " we", thus showing us that he has no interest in anything but wonderment.

It is here that we see Hamlet's deep philosophical nature. We know this because of the use of 'antithesis' in his speeches-" To be, or not to be - that is the question... ". Hamlet believes he has two choices, endure his misfortunes (and so continue to live) or follow an active plan of attacking the King (and so expose himself to an inevitable avenger's death or suicide). He constantly compares the two situations. This tool creates a dramatic effect. It contributes to the weighing, reflective tone as Hamlet balances alternatives for and against his ideas.

First he tells us why he wants to kill himself- " by a sleep to say we end the heartache and the natural shocks that flesh is heir to. " He tells us that killing himself will rid him of all the troubles of this world which all of mankind is destined to. On the other hand he also says- " but that the dread of something after death... makes us rather bear those ills we have than fly to others that we know not of? ". According to him it is the fear of life after death which makes man bear its suffering. So through the use of antithesis we see Hamlet's philosophical and ever conflicting mind.

Hamlet after meeting his father's ghost is in utter confusion. On one side his conscience tells him to avenge his mighty father and make him proud, but on the other hand his other conscience tells him to run away or commit suicide to get away from all this commotion and misery. His utterly confused

mind finally is too much for him to bear. He had lost all his friends except Horatio. They had turned against him to spy on Hamlet for the King. When Hamlet learns of this heartbreaking news it drives him even closer to the brink of insanity- " were you not sent for...

I know the good King and Queen have sent for you... ". All he wanted was for someone to help him solve his problems and for the truth to be revealed. He was let down by everyone, first his mother, then Ophelia, his friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern " be even and direct with me whether you were sent for or no", and finally Leartes who he loved as a brother- " I loved you ever". He was like a lost child in a dark forest with no one to help him and no one to talk to. The final soliloquy is one of Hamlet's richest and most interesting soliloquies. He tries to show some emotional logic in his soliloquy.

In this soliloquy Shakespeare in a way indirectly teaches us certain valuable lessons that are truly important. The soliloquy starts with a very graphic imagery-" how all occasions do inform against me and spur my dull revenge! ". Seeing the Norwegian army battling for their country had made Hamlet even more determined to take his fathers revenge. The words " inform, spur and dull" all show his extreme anger and hatred of Claudius. Shakespeare's use of adjectives and verbs create vivid images in the audiences mind, making the situation more realistic and intense.

During the Elizabethan times lights and special effects were not available so the imagery was conveyed in the form of dramatic words to the audience. Shakespeare had mastered and used this technique very well in his plays

especially in Hamlet. Hamlet examines the actions of Fortinbrass and compares himself to him- " Led by a delicate and tender prince, whose spirit with divine ambition puffed... ". And this comparison makes him feel ashamed once again, " examples gross as earth exhort me... ". Here he contradicts himself.

Contradiction is common throughout the play showing to us Hamlet's turmoil. Gross means disgusting and exhort means to go on. A gross example cannot exhort you to do anything but the opposite. So once again Hamlet gives us penetrating insights into his tortured thinking and he reproaches himself to that of resolve. He also teaches us that it is the brain of man that is really what distinguishes a man from a beast- " that capability and godlike reason to fust in us unused. " This quote therefore once again proves to us that Hamlet is a philosopher.

However later on he condemns himself for only talking and not acting upon it- " sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means to do it. ". He feels guilty because here an army is ready to give their life for their country and a piece of land and he himself just stands there and talks, and is not ready to kill a man who is going to be the downfall of a country- " how stand I then, that have a father killed, mother stained... to my shame I see the imminent death of twenty thousand men that for a fantasy and trick of fame go to their graves like beds.

He equates his greatness not with Christian virtue but with concern for ones reputation- " Rightly to be great is not to stir without great argument, but

greatly to find quarrel in a straw when honor's at the stake. " In other words his thinking is becoming Pagan and not Christian. Towards the end he sounds like Leartes who is hot-blooded but at the same time he senses he will not do so- " O, from this time forth, my thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth! ". Although in this soliloquy Hamlet tells us that he is ready to take action, we know he doesn't have the real will and determination.

Hamlet urges us to think about many things including family relationships. It is a family drama. Brother, sister, brother and brother, father and son and so on are the dynamics that I believe generates so much of the play's electricity. Then we have friendship and friendships betrayed; the nature of duty: to one's country, to those in power, to oneself, to God, to truth. And there, perhaps, is the reason why a four- hundred- years- worn text in Elizabethan English continues to excite people from so many different cultures and ideological positions.

In this play Shakespeare identifies and dramatizes in colorful, memorable and provocative ways, why; where we come from, where we have got to and where we will go next. The focus shifts continually between gauging the sureness of Shakespeare's craft and responding to the complex, serious and beautiful game he has set in motion between a text and an ever-renewing audience. As you can see the list of Shakespeare's genius is limitless. The dramatic death of Hamlet left a lasting impression on my mind personally.

Hamlet had the chance to avenge his father but instead wasted his chance on speculating and wondering. In the end not only he died, but so did the

rest of his family and loved ones. Procrastination is also a serious issue in today's world. Shakespeare makes this point clear to everyone young or old. What I learnt from the play Hamlet was to never leave anything for tomorrow what can be done today, thus making this play a brilliant portrayal of both education and knowledge