

Hamlet essay analysis

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



In Shakespeare's Hamlet, through his protagonist, he explores ideas relating to conflict. Using detailed textual evidence, how has your personal response to Hamlet been shaped through the composers use of dramatic techniques? '

[Hamlet] is a success, for he gets his man, but a failure, for he leaves eight bodies, including his own, where there was only meant to be one'- B.

Nightingale Shakespeare composed Hamlet as a representation of the conflict inherent in issues surrounding life and death and the many reinterpretations of the text attest to Catherine Belsey's theory of the ' myth of an unchanging human nature'.

Modern interpretations of Hamlet such as Kenneth Branagh's 1996 film use the medium of film and existential issues to create new meaning from Shakespeare's original text. In using the conventions of the revenge tragedy genre, expectations are created for an audience who understand the conflict that looms under Claudius's leadership unless Hamlet revenges his father's ' most foul and unnatural murder'. Yet Hamlet is conflicted over the moral dilemma that confronts him, expressing this through his Judeo Christian perspective of ' O cursed spite that ever I was born to set it right'.

His powerful use of soliloquy throughout the play explores the paradigm shift between Renaissance and Judeo-Christian ideas on life and life after death. ' To be or not to be... ' asks Hamlet, reflecting the philosophical existential concerns of this context and supporting the plays longevity for these paramount concerns remain relevant to every context. Here Shakespeare has successfully mirrored the ferment and change in his society, whilst modern directors mirror theirs in ways that reflect their values and beliefs. It

is for this reason that Shakespeare's work is described as 'not of an age, but for all time' (Ben Jonson).

Shakespeare's exploration of the conflict caused by the ferment of the times underpins Hamlet with Shakespeare's use of verisimilitude consistently used to explore events. We see Claudius mourning his brother's death, and reminding the court of his late 'most valiant brother'. However, the dramatic appearance of the apparition informs our understanding that Claudius is the 'Serpent that did sting [Hamlet's] father's life' by committing regicide, exposing Denmark by disturbing The Great Chain of Being and Divine Right of Kings.

Society begins to disintegrate, symbolically represented as 'something rotten in the state of Denmark' with metaphorical references to Denmark as 'an unweeded garden' where 'things rank and gross in nature' supporting the audience's understanding of the disorder within the natural world by the act of regicide. However, the use of revenge tragedy conventions continually reminds the audience that Hamlet will avenge the treacherous act in keeping with audience expectations. However, modern audiences will not always translate this inherent meaning as modern interpretations intensify the meaning inherent in new contexts.

Shakespeare's effective use of characterisation sees the affect of Claudius's action on him as well as he suffers the guilt of his 'offense' which holds the 'primal eldest curse' and allusion well understood by its audience. Claudius's other allusions to disease and corruption 'vile and loathsome crust' echoes his conflicted nature, and appropriately represents the state of Denmark in keeping with Elizabethan 'truth'. The use of the play within a play as a ploy

by Hamlet emphasizes and reflects his inability to find the absolute truth of Claudius' treachery before he acts.

Similar to Hamlet's inner conflict, Claudius is in a philosophical debate in his soliloquy where he prays to heaven asking forgiveness for his sin and to 'wash it white as snow', an admission of guilt but an inability to give up 'My crown, mine own ambition and my queen'. The conflict between Hamlet and Claudius is heightened as the audience become privy to Claudius' understanding that 'his words without thought will never go to heaven', leading to the expectation that both must die.

Whilst this is almost always the outcome of many modern reinterpretations of Hamlet the reason tends to centre on jealousy and envy and disloyalty rather than an understanding of the Great Chain of Being and the Divine Right of Kings. Hamlet's distinctive nature has not constrained its ability to be reinterpreted being received and valued in many different contexts, resulting in a diverse range of interpretations, in particular Kenneth Branagh's 1996 filmic version.

Branagh's four hour film is a holistic representation of the play and has encompassed Branagh's inclusive understanding of its unity. We know from Shakespeare's original that Hamlet struggles with his destiny and Branagh expands on this struggle shown particularly in Hamlet's soliloquy in Act 3 Scene 3. Claudius is praying, and Hamlet is ready with sword, Branagh uses an extreme close up of Hamlet's eyes symbolically a window to his soul and through the power of the medium of film he adds his reading as flashbacks on Hamlet's desire.

Claudius delivers his soliloquy in a confessional, with clothing exaggerating the irony of this act. The camera slowly zooms into Claudius during the soliloquy, so his true feelings are potently revealed. It is not just through words and dramatic techniques as with Shakespeare that meaning is made but through camera angles and close up shots demonstrating the power of different contexts to add and take meaning from the reinterpretation of a text.

Shakespeare has presented a play that reflects the meaning inherent in his context. Understanding Elizabethan England's milieu has allowed me to understand why Hamlet acts as he does and the conflict that arises within him. However, it is Branagh's production with the use of visual and cinematic techniques that has intensified the power of reinterpretations to explore new ideas about the text and Hamlet's actions and to realise the power of post modern ideas in creating new meaning for new audiences.