

# An interesting delayed resolution in hamlet

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



The great challenge of artists is to make a product the public want while still executing the artistic vision. If a work is focused entirely on artistic intent with no regard for entertainment value, it will likely alienate audiences. This is exemplified by much of the modern school of visual art, which is often ridiculed in the popular sphere for being meaningless and useless.

While the artistic vision is executed uncompromisingly, the art is appreciated only by a very small number of people. At the other extreme, there has been a rise in the production of pop music which is first and foremost a product designed to entertain, and only by the most liberal of estimates an act of artistic expression. Shakespeare managed to, at least in his time, pull the best of both worlds into his plays.

He was a master of creating work his audiences loved while still weaving in deeper layers of meaning. A prime example is Hamlet, in which the protagonist and namesake of the work waits to kill his uncle and thereby avenge his father until the very end of the play. This structure, which delays gratification for the audience as long as possible, makes the play a highly effective work of art because it both maximizes the entertainment value and the artistic value.

Artists must both work against human nature and on its behalf. While they seek to appeal to that which makes humans human, they must also dress their work in a certain way if it is to be appreciated by any significant number of people. One aspect of human nature which playwrights (or screenwriters in the modern world) are at odds with in particular is the tendency of people to always choose the path of least resistance. This

tendency leads people to consume art rather than appreciate it, that is, to take away only the experiential surface of a work and not any of the hidden insight. The lack of a quick and satisfying resolution at pivotal points in Hamlet forces audience members to more deeply consider the action of the story for the play's entire duration. For instance, Hamlet (referring to the character in this instance) covertly teases the audience in Act III Scene 3 when he nearly kills his uncle, then knelt in prayer, but decides against it at the last moment (Act III Scene 3 lines 88-89).

This ensures that the audience cannot just passively and comfortably accept the satisfaction of a resolution from the play, and therefore is woken into some sort of analysis of the action. People are nowhere more eager to pick apart a situation than when it is frustrating or dissatisfying. In this instance Hamlet justifies postponing Claudius' murder by saying that if he (Claudius) were to die in prayer, he would surely go to heaven, but if that if he can be killed without a chance to repent, he would surely be damned (Act III Scene 3 lines 94-96). This scene exemplifies Shakespeare's ability to stimulate thought in a reasonably receptive audience member, as it alone could initiate any number of musings, whether about Hamlet's real motivation, the nature of sin, et cetera. The more meaning an audience member can draw from a work, the more artistically successful the work is; therefore, the delay of resolution in Hamlet maximizes artistic value available in the play.

Another advantage to delaying plot-resolution gratification for the audience until the absolute end of a story is that it keeps the audience attentive throughout the whole work, and simultaneously heightens the drama in the

action. When audience attentiveness and drama in the story are maximized, the entertainment value of a work is maximized. The ultimate event the audience anticipates for the whole play is the murder of Hamlet's uncle, Claudius. This does not occur until the very end of the play, which is ideal for entertainment value; the play does not drag on after Claudius' death, so it does not have time to lose momentum.

Another factor of this which is equally important is that it is not clear until the very moment of the twisted king's death whether he will be killed at all. Hamlet acts very erratically, and this makes it difficult for an audience member to feel very surely one way or the other about the nature of his future decisions. While it seems clear when Hamlet says My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth! (Act IV Scene 4 line 66) that he fully intends to exact revenge on his uncle, he is often taken into long philosophical musings, one of which ends in the statement for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so which indicates that he believes there is no objective moral ground for any action. This contrast keeps the audience guessing up until Claudius very final moments. This unsureness about the conclusion of the action of the story keeps the audience engaged and the maintains the dramatic tension to a high level, maximizing the entertainment value of the story.

While there is an opportunity to make a case against Hamlet, saying its delayed resolution makes it an ineffective tragedy, in fact the opposite is true. The delay of Hamlet's revenge keeps the audience attentive throughout the play, awaiting that very resolution, which leads to a deeper

analysis of the hidden meaning of the text, maximizing artistic value, and also to an increased level of engagement in the drama and action of the story, maximizing entertainment value. The structure of the play allows for artistic value and entertainment value to be as high as possible, making the play as effective a drama as could be hoped for.