

# Hamlet – a study of procrastin

Literature, British Literature



William Shakespeare, perhaps the greatest playwright of all time, authored a number of works consisting of sonnets, comedies, and tragedies. In his brilliant career, Shakespeare created literary works of art. What makes Shakespeare unlike any other writer of his time, or thereafter, is his ability to organize a realistic plot, manage themes, and develop characters within his works. As well, Shakespeare's ability to provoke feeling and reaction to his writing is also what sets him apart from other common writers. Of his works, Hamlet is perhaps the most studied and most intriguing of the collected tragedies. In this play, many audiences and critics question the actions of the characters and particularly the actions of Hamlet. The answer to " Why does Hamlet delay in avenging the death of his father?" is one that is not easy to identify. Possible conclusions include the role of others in Hamlet, Hamlet's religious nature, or even Hamlet's tragic flaw as a hero in Hamlet.

In addition to the tragedy of human spirit, destiny, or the hero, Hamlet was written as a tragedy of conflict. In a close examination of the conflict of tragedy theme, there are two distinguishable types. The first involves the external conflicts; these often include elements such as antagonists, character foils, and other minor characters. The second involves the internal conflicts including self, morality, and justice. This internal type of conflict is the basis for Hamlet and the character's consequently tragic commission of a procrastinatic tragic hero. Together, both internal and external conflicts, if, when managed adequately, may be used as a measure for success in relation to overall effectiveness, as demonstrated in Hamlet. " Why, here are some eight violent deaths, not to speak of adultery, a ghost, a mad woman, and a fight in a grave!" (Bradley p. 93) In a few short words, the preceding

quote is somewhat true; however, it only describes the plot. The focus of Hamlet as it relates to the human condition is dependent on character. It is often argued that Hamlet was written as a tragedy of the human spirit. Others argue that it is a tragedy of destiny, or the hero. At any rate, during the time of the Elizabethan era, it was entertainment. However, William Shakespeare exceeded the obvious entertainment endeavour, and achieved almost every writer's natural quest: reflection from the audience. This reflection is perhaps a measure for all writers, provided that it is an audience whom the work is for. In almost every hero's quest for the truth, none is more apparent than that of young Hamlet. This search for truth is borne of the passing of young Hamlet's father. It is at the critical moment of revelation by the Ghost of Hamlet that young Hamlet is destined for revenge. Although the concept of revenge may be considered an evil justice, it is evident that the importance here lay within the context of carrying out the fate. " But why in the world did not Hamlet obey the Ghost at once, and so save seven of those eight lives?" (Bradley p. 93) In a more appropriate sense, the question becomes: " When will Hamlet kill Claudius to avenge the death of his father?" The how and when of this vengeance becomes increasingly critical in the development of Hamlet the character as opposed to Hamlet the play. To fully comprehend the true essence of Hamlet as a son, a discoverer, and a destroyer, one must analyze each individual characteristic as revealed to the audience by Shakespeare. Incredibly, it is because of Shakespeare's, perhaps unknowing consideration for the audience that reveals much about the characters in Hamlet, or any other play written by him for that matter. It was not enough that Shakespeare just

wrote the play, he also emphasized the character's thoughts and emotions through the soliloquies. In fact, the whole idea of drama is to feel, to an extent, what the character feels. This premise should not be mistaken, in that the actors of the play ultimately have the greatest influence on the dramatic emphasis of certain words, or actions. However, in Hamlet, the use of the soliloquy offers the audience a gateway into the minds of the characters, and in this case the various reasons why Hamlet delays in exacting revenge.

By Shakespeare's design, the depth of thought possessed by characters is easily measured by how effortlessly an audience can relate to what is being said or done during delivery of a soliloquy. While the script is fictional, the story within the play itself becomes believable. Undoubtedly, Hamlet is a man of action. Why then, does Hamlet require five Acts to finally prove this concept? A number of different possibilities exist. The single, most important of these possibilities are Hamlet's internal conflicts within his own mind, body, and soul. From the first Act, Hamlet displays a substantial amount of concern for his mother. "...Why, she would hang on him As if increase of appetite had grown By what it fed on; and yet, within a month -- Let me not think on't--Frailty, thy name is woman--..." (Hamlet Act I sc. ii) Clearly, Hamlet's concern for the Queen, his mother, is of genuine association to the death of King Hamlet. Within this solitary thought, Hamlet realized the severity of his mother's actions while also attempting to rationalize her mentality so that he may understand, and perhaps, cope with the untimely nature of the Queen's marriage to Claudius. Understandably, Hamlet is disturbed. Gertrude causes such confusion in Hamlet that throughout the

play, he constantly wondered how it could be possible that events would turn out the way that they had. This unfortunate turn of events is often questioned since Gertrude, the same woman who had instilled a great sense of religion in Hamlet, contradicts such a value that consequently proves "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark." (Marcellus Act I sc. iv) While regarding this as the principal means for Hamlet's frustration, it is not until seeing a spirit of patriarchal form that Hamlet decided to seek the truth, and ultimately, exact revenge. Upon envisioning the apparition, Hamlet sets out to avenge the death of his father, yet he is unclear as to the actual fulfillment of the revenge. Thus, Hamlet acknowledges that as a man of duty, justice, and honour, he must act upon the request of his late father. The concept of "antic disposition" is the feigned madness that Hamlet uses as his first step toward the revenge. Here, we have a clear indication that Hamlet was a thinker, and bore a calculating intellect. It is this very intellect that critics question in Hamlet's status as a hero, simply because it reinforced the theory that Hamlet embodied a critical and tragic flaw within his nature. At no time was any doubt of Claudius' guilt ever discussed between Hamlet and the Ghost with relation to King Hamlet's death. Young Hamlet was quick to accept these charges as truth; with the truth being accepted merely as a directive. Yet, at the time Hamlet knew his course, but had the option to seek it out on his own terms. "The time is out of joint. O cursed spite, That ever I was born to set it right!" (Hamlet Act I sc. v) Remaining consistent with his righteous characteristic as a hero in a Shakespearean tragedy, Hamlet reckons that the murder of Claudius can only be justified if it is done at the right moment. This is important to

consider since Hamlet is heir to the throne that Claudius did hold in Denmark. How then, if Hamlet killed Claudius is it possible that Hamlet could be able to explain a murder of such huge proportions, as that of the State's King? There is a definite danger in attempting to convince people that their King, a man of such divine rank, is anything less than that. The only character in Hamlet that did such a thing was Laertes. Furthermore, this incident only took place as a result of mistaken identity; an assumption that Polonius died at the hands of Claudius, when in reality, Hamlet was responsible. This is an audience's first indication that Hamlet is a man of action. It was however, revealed that Claudius was in no way responsible for the death of Laertes' father, and consequently, allowing Laertes and Claudius to conspire against Hamlet. One area of considerable significance in the delay of Claudius' condemnation is the burden of proof. Surprisingly, this concept of "needing evidence" existed in its earliest form through Shakespeare's Hamlet. In today's society, charges of the murderous sort are somewhat protected by the principle that all people are innocent until proven guilty. In Shakespeare's time however, it is interesting to note that someone like Hamlet exercised this ideal, seemingly a victim to the crime himself, and to the Elizabethan era in which this crime is evident. Brilliantly, Hamlet plans out an opportunity for Claudius to indicate some guilt, therefore allowing his conscience to freely carry out the murder of Claudius.

"Well, my lord. If he steal aught the whilst this play is playing, And 'scape detecting, I will pay the theft. (Horatio Act III sc. ii)

As the plot rises in action, Hamlet discovers enough through the play within Hamlet, known as The Mousetrap. In response to the King's inquiry as to the name of the

performance, Hamlet replies: " The Mousetrap. Marry, how? Tropically. This play is the image of a murder done in Vienna. Gonzago is the Duke's name; his wife, Baptista. You shall see anon. 'Tis a knavish piece of work, but what o' that? Your Majesty, and we that have free souls, it touches us not. Let the galled jade wince, our withers are unwrung." (Hamlet Act III sc. ii) Upon the completion of The Mousetrap, visible facial and behavioural expressions expose the no less than guilty King Claudius. Seemingly successful, Hamlet once again hesitates to kill. Could something be said of this unnecessary passive nature? It is difficult to say. What remains quite clear is that Hamlet determined once again, that the timing was not justified. His concern was the people and the Entire State of Denmark in addition to his own clarification in the probability that the Ghost was real. As a result of the overwhelming suggestion in The Mousetrap, Claudius, ironically a man of justice himself, seeks forgiveness from God. Coincidentally, Hamlet overhears Claudius admit in his own words, the guilt in that which King Claudius lived. " O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven / A brother's murder. / My Stronger guilt defeats my strong intent, / May one be pardon'd and retain the offence?" (Claudius Act III sc. iii)

In actuality, it is possible to argue that Hamlet had accumulated enough solid evidence to prosecute the King at this point, but because of his procrastinatic flaw, his intent became stronger than his will to act. There was really very little that stood in the way of Hamlet's revenge. Aside from a few guards, and minor characters in Hamlet, the task of putting an end to Claudius should have been no more difficult than killing trespassers or even thieves that may have committed their respective crimes in Denmark during

that time period. Keeping this entirety in mind, audiences should remember that revenge is not always justice served. " Now might I do it pat, now he is praying. And now I'll do't. And so he goes to heaven; And so am I revenged. That would be scann'd:

A villain kills my father, and for that, I, his sole son, do this same villain send To heaven." (Hamlet Act III sc. iii) It is difficult to imagine one's self as if he or she was Hamlet. The character of a tragic hero is not always easy to understand. Nevertheless, the greatest conclusion that audiences may draw from Hamlet is a simple one: behave according to truth, and justice should prevail. " Of thinking too precisely on the event--A thought which, quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom And ever three parts coward--I do not know Why yet I live to say this thing's to do, Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means, To do't." (Hamlet Act IV sc. iv) Hamlet, with great presence of mind, is an intellect beyond his era. The love for his mother, the concept of " innocent until proven guilty" and the righteousness associated to it, and the general sensitive restraint in Hamlet's heart, are all factors in analyzing Hamlet. Rational thought and human compassion are what make Hamlet a hero. Unfortunately, precision of thought and inability to act on necessary impulse, are the detrimental factors in creating the tragedy in Hamlet. In today's society and its values, Hamlet continues to be a tool in the contribution to ideals of value and morality. This story of a man and his downfalls should be considered a definite asset to the improvement of society, and a lesson learned in compassion for others. The best lessons are learned through mistakes.