

# The "hamlet" tragedy and the death incertitude

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In the aftermath of Old Hamlet's demise, Hamlet cannot think of anything other than death, and over the course of the play he considers it from various points of view. The inquiry of his own death plagues Hamlet as he constantly considers whether or not suicide is a morally acceptable action in a cruel and merciless world. He contemplates both the nonphysical repercussions of death and the physical remains of the dead. The idea of death is closely connected to the theme of uncertainty in that dying may shed some light on Hamlet's deepest and darkest questions, ending the dilemma of trying to determine truth in a perplexing world.

The idea of passing away plagues Hamlet as he continually contemplates whether or not suicide is the correct decision to make. Hamlet's grief and misery forces him to frequently long for death to end his suffering, but he worries that if he kills himself, he will be committed to eternal misery in hell because of the religious ramifications that prohibit suicide. In his famous, "To be or not to be" soliloquy (III. i. 56), Hamlet is clearly struggling with whether or not he should end it all or continue on living to take revenge on his uncle for his father's unjust and untimely death. By saying "Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer/ the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune/ or to take arms against a sea of troubles..." it demonstrates that he has conflicting feelings about what would be more worthwhile. Should he continue on living in his Hell of a world, or end it so he won't have to feel any more pain? He philosophically concludes that no one would choose to endure the pain of life if he or she were not afraid of what will come after they die, and that it is this fear which causes difficult moral contemplations to interfere with the capacity for action. When Hamlet articulates, "To die, to

sleep;/ to sleep, perchance to dream..." (III. i. 64-65) he is undoubtedly inquisitive about the idea that humans dream when they have left the mortal world but he's not sure if they will be joyful dreams or wicked nightmare. It is this uncertainty that ultimately leads Hamlet to continue on living to fulfill his promise he made to his father to take revenge on Claudius.

Not only does Hamlet fear the dreams he believes will haunt him when passes on, but he is also preoccupied by what happens to the physical remainders of those who have crossed over. Hamlet mentions how though throughout life people have different social status and individuals tend to think that some are more important than others, in the end, we all meet the same fate. For example, when Hamlet says, "Your fat king and lean begger is but/ variable service – two dishes to one table" (IV. iii. 23-24), he is explaining to the king that regardless of social status, we all return to dust to fertilize the ground when we die. Hamlet goes into more detail on this topic when he says, "Alexander/ died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth/ to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam, and/ why of that loam whereto he has converted might/ they not stop a beer barrel?" (V. i. 201-205). He realizes that everyone will eventually turn to dust, even highly respectable and admirable men such as Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar. Hamlet suggests that since Julius Caesar has now disintegrated, he has become part of the dust used to patch up a beer barrel or repair a wall. It could be said that Hamlet is thinking that even after death, humans could still be useful. He goes on to explain the series of events that never seem to end when he says "A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a/ king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm." (IV. iii. 27-28). It is this whole

cycle of life that keeps the world turning. It's at this point in the play that Hamlet is slowly coming to terms with the idea of death and the realization that his impending doom is near.

In contrast, the spiritual aspects of the play must be looked upon as well. Again, Hamlet's obsession with death is so great that he is prepared to risk everything to follow the ghost, despite being warned by his friends that following the ghost is a reckless decision. Regardless of the fact that Hamlet is ignorant to what will occur in the future, he continues to listen to his heart and believe the words of the deceased king of Denmark. The ghost in Hamlet clearly executes a significant dramatic purpose. Old Hamlet's ghost unveils the suspicions already living in the darkest recesses of Hamlet's mind. When Hamlet actually looks at the ghost and hears its words, he voices the thought of his underlying suspicions by saying, " Oh my prophetic soul! My uncle!" (I. v. 41). One of the reasons why the ghost is so intriguing in Hamlet is due to the fact that near the beginning of the play, no one could guarantee whether or not the ghost has positive intentions. It has the physical resemblance of the deceased king of Denmark but his motives are not quite clear. The scepticism Hamlet and his companions show in the beginning regarding the ghost indicates their reluctance to put faith in their senses. They do not want to just assume that the ghost is evil, but they all want some undoubted proof; not only of the fact of the ghost's appearance, but also the truth of his words. The ghost plants the idea in Hamlet's mind about what kind of experiences death and Hell will offer when he says " My hour is almost come/ when I to sulph'rous and tormenting flames" (I. v. 4-5) and " Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,/ and for the day confin'd to fast in fires..." (I.

v. 10-11). The vague descriptions of Hell depict a terrifying scene which may perhaps be one of the reasons why Hamlet is so frightened of death.

Since death is both the cause and the consequence of revenge, it is intimately connected to the theme of justice and revenge – Claudius's murder of King Hamlet initiates Hamlet's pursuit for vengeance, and Claudius's death is the end of that pursuit. Unfortunately, when Hamlet pursues revenge, he is not quite sure what the outcome will be. It is doubtful that he would have gone through with his revenge if he was aware of the consequences. One clear example of this would be when Hamlet organised the play which portrays the truth about the death of his father as a strategy to force Claudius to reveal his guilt; the reaction of Claudius is all Hamlet requires to seek revenge for his father's murder. Claudius confirms Hamlet's suspicion that he is involved with his father's murder when he says " Give me some light. Away" (III. ii. 263). If Claudius is not guilty of anything, the play Hamlet helps construct would not affect him so severely. The problem with revenge in Hamlet is that it becomes such a complicated procedure that is full of uncertainty with how the expected events are supposed to turn out.

In conclusion, whether it's Hamlet's own death, the curiosities connected with the spiritual properties and physical remnants of the dead, or the link between revenge and demise, the idea of death is closely connected to the theme of uncertainty. Hamlet's uncertainty ultimately delays him from fulfilling his promise to his father's ghost, which ends up causing the avoidable deaths of Ophelia, Gertrude, Polonius, Laertes, Rosencrantz and

Guildenstern. Hence, if Hamlet had made up his mind and had been more committed to his mission, he could have prevented some unnecessary deaths. In the end, Hamlet's mission finishes with his mind at rest and some of his deepest and darkest questions are answered, ending the dilemma of trying to determine truth in his confusing life.