

Hamlet – textual integrity essay



**ASSIGN
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How has your critical study of 'Hamlet' shaped your understanding of the textual integrity of the dramatic piece? William Shakespeare's famous tragedy 'Hamlet' follows a young prince of Denmark who after his father's death, is confronted by his father's ghost and sets out to prove his uncle's participation in killing his father and marrying his mother, "the serpent that did sting thy father now wears his crown".

For over 400 years, Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' has been studied and examined countless times by scholars and students alike, all of whom have had different interpretations on the dramatic piece as a consequence of the textual integrity of the play. The play's exposure of life's fundamental and timeless questions in which are still relevant today, allows for the continual study and reinterpretation of the dramatic piece.

Hamlet's character does not conform to a typical tragic hero in the fact that Hamlet's personal qualities lack hubris or any form of excessive pride which is one of the fundamental causes of the fall of any traditional tragic hero. For Hamlet, rather it's his hamartia or tragic flaw of vacillation and indecisiveness "thou art a scholar," that leads to Hamlet's downfall.

Because of this, it can be argued that Hamlet was not suited to the task that was set out before him, as seen in Hamlet's first soliloquy in which is formed by the question, "who's there?"

This foreshadows Hamlet's continual contemplative state throughout the entirety of the play and therefore emphasises Hamlet's inability to act as a result of his indecisiveness between what is morally right and morally wrong. This interpretation contributes to the enigmatic qualities of the dramatic piece in

which have been speculated for more than three centuries as a result of the playwright's textual integrity.

Different responses to the play arise from variations in world view in which is influenced by the historical, social and cultural context in which the play was written and performed, in comparison to the views of modern audiences. The continuation of critical studies of Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' have been a result of the humanistic themes present in the play that were relevant within Shakespeare's era and are still of relevance today.

Shakespeare's exploration of humanism set paradigms for the play's audiences throughout history and continuing throughout modern society. "There is something rotten in the state of Denmark," explores the corruption of the divine political order of the state which was disrupted by Claudius and Gertrude's marriage which was considered incest as a result of the Protestant Reformation at the time of the play and Claudius' regicide/fratricide. The divine order of Denmark cannot be restored until Claudius is punished, "fall of the sparrow," therefore Shakespeare emphasises the significance of the 'divine right of Kings' and how the corruption of this has disastrous outcomes - evident in Hamlet's murder of Claudius, "thy doll revenge."

Shakespeare explores revenge as being unnecessary. Hamlet's quest for revenge results in Hamlet killing many people in which ultimately results in his 'courageous' acceptance of death in order to restore divine order, where the legitimate King comes in the form of Fortinbras. Therefore it can be argued that Hamlet can be read as an exploration of humanism through the

use of foils which teach audiences lessons of human character which were of relevance in the context of the play as well as within modern society.

Hamlet, Laertes and Fortinbras are considered the play's foils as all characters are in a quest to avenge their father's deaths in a direct reflection of the ancient Greek philosophy, pagan revenge code. Fortinbras inherits the kingdom because his human character is considered 'sanguine' as he has the perfect balance between thought and action. Hamlet and Laertes, on the other hand do not have this balance, Hamlet is considered 'melanchloric' (thought without action) whereas Laertes is considered 'chloric' (action without thought) and as a result, both characters die.

Shakespeare's use of foils therefore contribute to the textual integrity of the play and the continuation of its relevance even in modern societies through the play's exploration of human character, humanity and the fundamental, timeless questions of life which still go unanswered today. Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' draws of 2000 years of craft and is a synthesis of Greek theatre and Roman tragedies of blood, therefore 'Hamlet' is considered the perfect balance between action and drama, contributing to the continual study of the play.

'Hamlet' is considered to have literary merit through the exploration of complex psychological issues which are portrayed through the play's multidimensional characters; Hamlet, Claudius and Ophelia. Hamlet, as the protagonist has to do what is morally wrong in order to be morally right, "to sleep purchase a dream," which gives Hamlet reasonings for his vacillation. Claudius, although evil, feels guilt - "this doth prick my conscience,"

influencing the audience to sympathise with the antagonist, unusual of a traditional Senecan-based tragedy.

Ophelia is tossed between her loyalty to her father and her loyalty to Hamlet and thus she goes crazy. Over time, in response to the shifting values and attitudes of society, Ophelia can be considered a feminist character.

Metatheatre further communicates Shakespeare's ideas of revenge and humanistic themes, through questioning societal norms whilst also allowing for imaginative variation. The plays incorporation of more conflict and complication through sub-plots adds to the textual integrity of the text.

The Mousetraps, 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and Hamlet's "antic disposition" contribute to the enigmatic qualities of the play making the play difficult to interpret, thus adding to the mystery of the play. As a result of this, scholars and students alike, continue to study 'Hamlet' and the textual integrity of the dramatic piece. The enigmatic qualities of William Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' allows for the continual reinterpretation and study of the text. The play draws of humanistic themes and questionings regarding; love, revenge, loyalty, devine order and life/death, all of which still go unanswered in todays modern world view.

The play's textual integrity allows for its audiences to learn not only of the crime of regicide nor the 'perfect' human character as depicted in Fortinbras. Rather it allows its audiences to understand the historical, social of cultural context of the time in which 'Hamlet' was performed and how the changing values and attitudes of society can influence an individual's

interpretation of the characters and plot. Hence why the textual integrity of 'Hamlet' is continually open to reinterpretation and critical analysis.