

Decrypted lifestory of hamlet

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



It has been inferred by researchers for decades that Shakespeare used the plots and characters of his theatrical works to comment on the current political climate of England's monarchy at the time. During the late 16th and early 17th century, persecution at the hands of the government was a common practice. Furthermore, persecution on the grounds of treason was also a viable possibility for those who spoke ill of the royal family through any medium. For this reason, it would have been imperative for Shakespeare to protect himself from these consequences if he were to convey his opinions of the monarchy through his writings. To do this, Shakespeare would have to allegorize his writings through various writing techniques. These methods are clearly displayed in Hamlet. Shakespeare uses the characters and plotlines of Hamlet as an allegory for the political happenings of the time. By placing the story far away in Denmark, Shakespeare is able to comment on the current political climate while protecting himself from persecution. The relevance of Hamlet to the monarchy in England and other European powers is evident throughout the text and portrays a clear opinion on the disloyal and vindictive tendencies of Europe's monarchs.

Shakespeare's motives behind writing in this cryptic allegorical manner are revealed through his political and religious views. During Shakespeare's lifetime, Queen Elizabeth the 1st outlawed Catholicism. While it is widely considered that there is no conclusive evidence to define Shakespeare's religion, Shakespeare did in fact confess to Catholicism on his death bed, "" He dyed a Papyst". Davies, an Anglican clergyman, could have had no conceivable motive for misrepresenting the matter in these private notes and as he lived in the neighbouring county of Gloucestershire he may be

echoing a local tradition.” (Thurston). Shakespeare’s conflicting religious views would have led to his great disdain of Queen Elizabeth and her condemnation of Catholicism. Forced to practice in secret and to hide his faith for fear of persecution, Shakespeare would have harbored great resentment towards the government that outlawed his religion. In addition to this, his ability to express this resentment was stifled by strict laws of censorship. Shakespeare would have been prevented from publishing anything that explicitly spoke ill of the monarchy.

The similarities and possible connections between Hamlet and the real political happenings of England’s monarchy at the time are undeniable. The plot of Hamlet revolves around the implications placed on the royal family as the result of an extremely unethical king and his weak and feeble wife Gertrude. Queen Gertrude is depicted as a character that contributes greatly to the tragedy of the play. She incestually remarries her recently deceased husband’s brother in an effort to maintain her title as Queen, a relationship which is even implied to have been formerly adulterous. Claudius’ sinister plan seems unheeded, if not aided, by Gertrude herself. The demise of this noble family is fueled by Gertrude’s inability to prevent Claudius’ evil actions and Hamlet’s descent into madness. Shakespeare clearly asserts his views of female monarchs through the use of Gertrude. Shakespeare explicitly conveys his opinion of women in this play, stating, “ Frailty, thy name is woman!” (Hamlet, Act 1 Scene 2). Through the use of Gertrude’s character, Shakespeare implies his disapproval of Queen Elizabeth. Queen Elizabeth’s reign was controversial in a similar way to Gertrude’s. Gertrude struggles with maintaining the throne after her husband’s death, a contributing factor

in her marriage to Claudius, his brother. Queen Elizabeth also faced a similar problem,

“ If she made a marriage alliance with a European prince, England would be lost. On the other hand, if she died childless, the threat of civil war and a further shift in religion loomed. To maintain her political power, Elizabeth would need to remain single; but to ensure England’s safety she would need to marry.” (Lavery).

While Gertrude’s sexuality and duty as a Queen is greatly put into question in Hamlet, Queen Elizabeth’s is equally scrutinized during her reign as queen. Queen Elizabeth was constantly forced to balance her womanly sexuality while maintaining a façade of masculine power in order to be taken seriously as a leader. While Queen Elizabeth ruled effectively for the vast majority of her reign, she was sixty-eight when Hamlet debuted in 1600. By then, her allure as a young woman had diminished and her politics were beginning to be questioned. Towards the end of her reign, Queen Elizabeth had to capitalize on her femininity and “ make use of her image as a sexual female to maintain her political position” (Lavery). Contrastingly, in Hamlet, Gertrude also struggles with issues of sexuality in order to maintain the throne. Hamlet debuted three years before Queen Elizabeth’s death, and there is a strong parallel between these two political structures that both present the issue of an aging queen whose sexuality places implications on her status within the monarchy. Shakespeare uses Gertrude to convey his opinion on Queen Elizabeth. Shakespeare clearly believes that Queen Elizabeth is a feeble and weak-minded Queen who uses her sexuality to

further her political gain. If Shakespeare were to write about Queen Elizabeth in this way in one of his historical plays, he would have surely been executed on the grounds of treason. For this reason, Shakespeare must transfer his view on Queen Elizabeth to a fictional queen in Denmark to avoid any consequence for conveying his opinion.

The theme of revenge is a driving force in Hamlet; All of Hamlet's actions are justified by his intense and insatiable need to avenge his father. His need to seek revenge as well as his inability to act on these urges indirectly lead to the death of every character. Coincidentally, revenge was a common theme in the monarchy of the time. Prior to the rise of the Tudors, a practice called " blood feuds" was common among families. A blood feud was a private act of revenge in which violence was acceptable regardless of the legality and guilt of the offender. The act of blood feuding allowed individuals who believed they had been wronged to avenge themselves or others without intervention by the state. However, Queen Elizabeth later outlawed the practice of blood feuds to assert the power of the state over individual liberties such as these. With the monarchy acting as a judicial body, the act of blood feuds is made obsolete. However, this judicial system was often corrupt and ineffective at preventing the violent tendencies so deeply ingrained in their people. In the plot of Hamlet, there is a clear struggle between action in the form of a blood feud, juxtaposed by the context of a governing, and therefore judicial family. While Hamlet is technically part of the group that would require individuals to refrain from blood feuding and to instead refer to his own family for judicial deliberation, he believes that the only way to avenge his father is through personal, passionate vengeance

instead of lawful deliberation. These were the issues regarding revenge that faced England during the time. Shakespeare uses this theme in Hamlet to convey that judicial power at the hands of the state is ineffective, and that person blood feuds are the only true way to avenge a person. This contributes to Shakespeare's disapproval of the actions of the monarchy at the time and therefore offers another reason why he would want to speak out against them. By greatly expanding the issues of the British monarchy to an almost satirical extent in Hamlet and centering them around the royal Danish family, Shakespeare can offer poignant and relatable issues to his audiences.

Why would Shakespeare have wanted to create such an allegorical piece of writing? What were his intentions? In a time of such intrusive government that regulated so many aspects of life and imposed censorship to prevent treason, Shakespeare probably needed a creative outlet. There were no online political forums where Shakespeare could freely express his opinions and disapproval of the government at the time. In fact, Shakespeare couldn't even speak a word against the monarchs for fear of persecution.

Shakespeare was certainly an intelligent and opinionated man, and censorship to this extent would have been frustrating to him and his fellow citizens. Shakespeare used his plays as a way to express his disdain and exasperation for a government that allowed him to do so in no other way. In addition to this, Shakespeare was writing to an audience. The success of his plays relied on the audience's reaction. Topics such as the ones explored in Hamlet would have elicited a strong reaction from the audience. Issues such as an aging Queen, a corrupt government and revenge would have been

pertinent to the audience, as they were indeed experiencing life under the same government as Shakespeare. The nature of the political context of Hamlet offers the readers information that affects the way his works are read and the way he is viewed as a writer. It is evident that Shakespeare is a savvy playwright that is able to navigate and dodge the consequences of his writings. His clever use of allegorization allows him to convey ideas that he would not have been able to without this system. We can learn about the British monarchy of this time in a way that we cannot from other works due to censorship. Because Shakespeare was able to evade this censorship, his works are greatly significant for the inferences his readers can draw from them about historical attitudes.

Works Cited

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