

Hamlet as a tragic hero

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As we know, there are different types of tragedies; Aristotle spoke about a certain type which involves what was once called Peripeteia, Hamartia and Anagnorisis. He said a tragedy is characterized by a tragic hero or heroine who experiences a change or reversal in fortune (peripeteia) which is caused by a personal flaw or mistake (hamartia). The downfall of the hero in a tragedy should not be, however, caused by an external force such as a higher power, whether in the form of gods, fate or even society; it should be the result of an action—or lack of action—carried out by the hero.

Finally, the hero must achieve a kind of revelation or recognition (anagnorisis) about destiny or the will of the gods, what Aristotle called " a change from ignorance to awareness of a bond of love or hate. " These are all characteristics that make an ideal Greek tragedy. However, our purpose is to analyze William Shakespeare's ' Hamlet', a Renaissance tragedy; therefore, the question at hand is, could Hamlet, prince of Denmark, possibly be called and defined as a tragic hero?

Our first instinct is to say no, but once we start questioning ourselves and really exploring the character and all that he goes through throughout the play, our answers may change. In ' Hamlet' the three defining moments in Greek tragedy mentioned above, if truly present, are intertwined and closely linked together. We will attempt to translate those key aspects present in Aristotle's description into a completely different type of tragedy such as ? Hamlet' and see how they would portray themselves in Shakespeare's words.

Afterwards, we will analyze this English writer's work in terms of the imagery found in the play at hand. We must begin at the core of the play: the apparition of the ghost. Before the ghost of the former king of Denmark, Hamlet senior, makes his appearance, all we know is that Hamlet's father has passed away, that his uncle has taken the throne and has married his late brother's wife. Once we hear the ghost's statement the plot of the play is set in motion; Hamlet goes from ignorance to knowledge—that is, if we choose to believe that there actually is a ghost and that the ghost speaks the truth.

The spirit tells the prince of Denmark that he was murdered and by none other than his own brother; we could take this as the prince's moment of recognition, when, in a way, his whole destiny changes. He now has a new purpose in life, to avenge his father's death. The bond of love and affection he felt for his uncle is now completely distorted and turned into pure hatred, anger and a thirst for revenge. The next step in our analysis is our 'tragic hero's' change in fortune. As we know, Hamlet's plan was to get back at his uncle, and in Act III, Scene III he has the perfect opportunity when he walks in on Claudius praying, My fault is past.

But O, what form of prayer Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder?' That cannot be, since I am still possess'd Of those effects for which I did the murder— My crown, mine own ambition and my queen. May one be pardon'd and retain the offence? Hamlet, however, hesitates and decides not to kill Claudius while in prayer because he would go to heaven, thus his desire for vengeance would not be satisfied. To take him in the purging of his soul,

When he is fit and season'd for passage? No. Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent.

What Hamlet was not aware of was that Claudius was not asking for forgiveness because, as he says, the reasons for which he committed the murder, his ambition and his desire for the crown and the queen, still possess him, therefore he does not regret what he did. My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. Words without thoughts never to heaven go. From this point forward everything just goes downhill. Hamlet missed his one shot all because of his lack of action. Here is where we introduce the final piece of our analysis.

Hamlet's tragic flaw could be his indecisiveness on how to proceed and carry out his plans or maybe his procrastination; whatever it is, he made a conscious mistake which made him completely responsible for later events, his death, Laertes', his mother's and Ophelia's. The prince ultimately brought about his own downfall. 'Hamlet', as a tragedy, certainly differs from the Greek mold, but it is safe to say that not entirely. I believe Shakespeare's character could be considered as a sort of tragic hero if we choose to associate events the way we have throughout this paper. Of course, there is no way to determine whether or not Hamlet truly is a tragic hero such as Aristotle meant to depict them, it is all subjective. In my opinion, the idea is not too overreaching or farfetched; I actually think it is a valid way of analyzing this most interesting character. Our other purpose was to analyze the imagery, and most specifically the nature imagery, found in the play. In 'Hamlet', Shakespeare seems to rely on nature (plants, weather, animals, etc.

) a lot to express what the characters are feeling. When it comes to analyzing specifically how he thought of the state and the people of Denmark, one word is key: weeds.

The weed is defined as “ A plant considered undesirable, unattractive, or troublesome, especially one growing where it is not wanted, as in a garden. ” During the time of late King Hamlet’s rule, Denmark was considered, as prince Hamlet calls it in Act I Scene II, “ an unweeded garden”; however, once Claudius murders his brother the king and takes the crown, his sin, greed and corruption bring decay to the kingdom. “ Something is rotten in the state of Denmark” states Marcellus in Act I, Scene IV. The weed is the symbol of death and poison in Denmark. Claudius poisoned Hamlet’s father and is now poisoning everybody else with his deceit.

Later on in Act III, Scene IV, while talking to his mother Hamlet says, Whiles rank corruption, mining all within, Infects unseen. Confess yourself to heaven, Repent what’s past, avoid what is to come, And do not spread the compost on the weeds, To make them ranker. He is telling her to open her eyes and realize how her new king is infecting their country; he then asks her not to keep helping him in doing so—not to spread the compost on the weeds anymore. We can say, without a doubt, that throughout the whole play Shakespeare refers to the state of Denmark and its people as if they were a garden.

Understanding the nature imagery in ‘ Hamlet’ is essential to understanding the true meaning behind the play. Denmark used to be a beautiful, healthy garden until its gardener was poisoned; when there was suddenly a new

gardener the earth and the plants started dying and nobody did anything to fix it. The subtle way in which Shakespeare is able to use metaphor and simile over and over again in his works without it getting tedious or discouraging is probably one of the reasons why he is considered the greatest writer in the English language.