

How do images of  
disease and  
corruption support the  
opening of hamlet



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As a revenge tragedy, "Hamlet" is saturated with the dual themes of disease and corruption. However the opening of this play is particularly embedded with these themes and function as a useful indicator as to the flavour of what is to come. In this essay, I will analyse the key function of images in the opening act of "Hamlet" and examine how these images of disease and corruption create the all important tension needed to ignite this tragic play. Right from Act one, scene 1 the readers immediately get the impression that, there is something erroneous going on in the scene, and there is something that the guards; "Barnardo and Francisco" are frightened or troubled by.

We get this intuition directly from the following quotation by Francisco; "... 'Tis bitter cold, And I am sick at heart.

"The readers get the notion of a sense of uneasiness, in the scene simply due to the mere words spoken by Francisco, the guard. This creates an image of an almost "diseased" man who is "sick at heart." The readers believe and come up with some kind of an indication, that this guard, "Francisco" is either ill, due to a disease, which he may have, or there is something that is troubling him to such an extent that, it has made him feel "sick at heart." Therefore as a whole this image of disease most definitely supports the opening of "Hamlet.

"Almost, immediately after Francisco informs the audience that he is "sick at heart," the ghost of the previous king, father of prince Hamlet appears. This point is carefully illustrated by Barnardo's reaction, where he informs the audience and the other guards of who the ghost is," In the same figure

like the king that's dead." Just by the ghost of the previous dead appearing out from nowhere at the castle, immediately informs the reader that there is something most definitely wrong. There is something seriously wrong for a dead king to be coming back to the castle and then disappearing. When the ghost shows up, Horatio is told to speak to it.

Charging the ghost to speak the ghost stalks off offended," Marcellus: It is offended."| Horatio, however, concludes the appearance of the ghost," . . .

bodes some strange eruption to our state." By that, Horatio means to fundamentally say, " I think this ghost means we're in trouble!"

nevertheless, on the whole, the fact that a ghost has appeared without a word of warning onto " earth," a place where only " humans"- living people live, has completely changed the " ordinary." From this appearance, the readers get a explicit sense of corruption. Corruption to such an extent, that the dead have started to walk the earth, like they own the planet, where they unquestionably do not belong! The readers create images in their minds of this " dead" king walking around the place as if the supernatural and living is living together in peace and harmony, which in this case is beyond doubt. By Shakespeare, using this technique of making ghosts appear without warnings, he is playing with what is the " norm" and in return is getting the audience and readers to analyse why this ghost has appeared, what may be the reason and whether it has a motive? He is actively engaging the readers and audiences attention, without them even knowing of it. Following on from the disease imagery, Hamlet says such a phrase in his soliloquy, which if studied carefully informs the readers of what the distorted youthful Hamlet if feeling.

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His repugnance for his mother marrying his father's brother so soon after the funeral of her late husband, Hamlet's father, has caused him to feel so disheartened that he believes the only way out of this misery would be if he does what is mentioned in the following quotation said by Hamlet himself; "O that this too too sullied flesh would melt, Thaw and resolve itself into a dew." This immediately creates an image of a person, in this case, young Hamlet standing alone, mourning his father's death, looking so depressed at the same time, disgusted by his mother's hasty decision of marrying her late husband's brother soon after the funeral. Then all of a sudden, Hamlet; melting and vanishing into something so small, which will vaporise, dissolve and never be seen of or heard of ever again, as if it never existed. This image creates a definite image of disease in the mind of the readers. Therefore in effect, makes the reader realise how upset this young man really is by the whole scenario.

Directly arising from the fact that Hamlet's mother married her late husband's brother, so rapid after his death, may also be another form of corruption, she married so quick they were able to use the leftovers from the funeral to feed all at the wedding feast; "Hamlet: ...the funeral bak'd meats, Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables." From the above quotation, the reader seems to gain a sense of corruption in a form that is quite small. This form being the fact, that the mother could have waited longer, at least given the chance for people close to the king to come to terms with his death, for example; Hamlet.

The queen was corrupted in such a manner that she could have waited and not made a decision so hastily; this decision upset many people around her, <https://assignbuster.com/how-do-images-of-disease-and-corruption-support-the-opening-of-hamlet/>

of which whom, only Hamlet lets out his feelings in his soliloquy."...Frailty, thy name is woman..

..” Also from the fact that the queen married the king's brother, Claudius so fast, suggests that there may have been something going on between them before the late king Hamlet passed away. This however, may not be true, as the readers are forced to make assumptions, as they have not been told of what has actually happened. This again actively engages the readers' minds as they are having to guess what may have been the cause in the past to cause so much pain and misery now in the present. The second time the ghost appears in the presence of his son Hamlet. This time the ghost actually talks to Hamlet, and this time, informs him of the cause of his death, which is an immediate image of corruption;”.

.. The serpent that did sting thy father's life, Now wears his crown.” This, without a doubt is definitely a sign of corruption. Corruption, not in one way, but in two. The readers get the first impression of corruption through the fact that this ghost has come onto earth a place where only living people live not the supernatural.

Secondly, this ghost has informed young Hamlet, his son, the cause, in this case the murder committed by his uncle who is now the king. This is now seen as the most important form of corruption that has taken place throughout the play. The fact that the present king, Claudius only became king, because he ruthlessly murdered his brother to seek the throne, on which he now sits as king! The readers and audience feel disgusted by what they have just heard and also want young Hamlet to take revenge for his father's

death. Overall, I come to a conclusion, that the fact that Claudius the present king murdered his brother the previous king is the biggest form of corruption in the play.

To me it is the backbone for all the events that will follow; it is the main cause of all the problems that are occurring. If Claudius hadn't murdered himself, then Hamlet would not want to melt into a dew, his mother would not have married Claudius, everything would have been just fine. Corruption seems to be the main theme of the play and disease follows on from that. However the imagery of disease only arises through corruption. If there had been no corruption in the play from the beginning, then there would have not been any disease imagery, Hamlet would not have felt like vanishing and melting and Francisco would not have felt " sick at heart."