Literary Analysis of Shakespeare's Hamlet

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Hamlet, Tragedy, and the Structure of the Play

"Hamlet," a play well written and marvelously presented by Shakespeare, relates to the story associated with the legend of Hamlet (Amleth) as perceived in Danish history around the twelfth century. The story of Hamlet had evolved throughout History before Shakespeare penned it down in his version to present a better perspective on it through his approach to the story. Shakespeare's version of Hamlet consists of iambic pentameter, also known as blank verse, with clever and ingenious words to describe the situations. Hamlet is cunning but does not skip his fate as his foreshadowing in Act 4, Scene 4. Twisted fate fiddled with young Prince Hamlet, as Shakespeare conveyed to his audience.

The well-known tragedy presented by William Shakespeare in Hamlet is laid out into five acts, whereas the development of the narration follows the reader till the conclusion, constructing an interesting paradox towards Hamlet's character and his strength towards the meaning found in the morality of life and death. The changes witnessed in Hamlet's character occur as he continuously struggles with the thought of life and death, his perception towards taking life, and whether doing so will make him happier. The main problem arises with the hero as he finds himself unable to take the initiative of avenging the death of his father but finds himself doubting his motives at certain parts of the plot. Hamlet's character is portrayed as someone who has a heightened emotional response towards various moral aspects of life. He is notably more of a thinker and less of an actor. The element of ambiguity imbued in his character makes him more of a human than most. At first glance, the thematic view of the story exhibits elements of old, meaning heritage, and revenge. Elements like this may appear quite outdated for present readers. Being able to relate to the events as they unfold can assist the reader in establishing an understanding of the topic. Hamlet is the main protagonist since he displays characteristics that present a great dramatic progression in his role. However, at a quick glance, it may be difficult to distinguish between the characters fit to be categorized as the protagonists.

In Act Four, the plot has already reached a point of great tension, with the events linked to Polonius dying. At this point in the story, it becomes evident in King Claudius's obvious lack of political talent when he suppresses the news of Polonius's death, burying his old advisor without any ceremony or circumstances associated with it. As Claudius tries to keep everything well-hidden and mysterious, even the details and nature of death are kept well-obscured. King Claudius's political treatment, along with his death, forms one of the most central elements of the plot of Act Four. Other than these,

Ophelia’s madness and Laertes’s return give a twist to the plot.

Soliloquy, Revenge, and Moral Deliberation

Prior to investigating the plot further, it is essential to understand the soliloquy in Act Four, which is “How all occasions do inform against me.” This portion of the speech can be reiterated to the point he declared in his previous soliloquy regarding the actor who took the role of Hecuba. Hamlet displays his befuddlement on the stance of people mindlessly marching to their deaths, essentially the soldiers. He considers war over the worthless ground to be meaningless, whereas, in his criteria, he has a valid reason to engage King Claudius in the battle to avenge the death of his beloved (Lacan, Miller, and Hulbert 1977). Hamlet views this notion in the form of melancholy and introspection; however, he shakes off the very thought of it by employing the use of excessive contemplation. He is found to be making a remark: “Rightly to be great/is not to stir without great argument, / But greatly to find quarrel in a straw/ When honor’s at stake.” However, this does not fit Hamlet’s character and the way he views an idealistic approach to the matter. He addresses it as a bloody thought, one unfitting for his character and something that his father’s spirit is not in need of. He states that the Ghost of Senior Hamlet requires bloody action against Claudius instead of thoughts, whereas bloody deeds are beyond the reach of the protagonist.

In Act IV, Scene IV, Hamlet encounters his foil, Prince Fortinbras, with a massive army that will die for a small plot of land that would not contain twenty thousand corpses. Fortinbras is characterized by Hamlet for the ambitions that will lead him and his men to their graves. Hamlet admires Fortinbras’s enthusiasm and sees him as a fearless war leader trying to gain his reputation as the young Prince of Norway. William Shakespeare uses words like delicate and tender, which means that he is a gentle and charming prince. Hamlet also sees Fortinbras as a fragile, naïve, and weak person who was born with a gold spoon in his mouth; Fortinbras and his men’s motivation was not as righteous and divine as Hamlet’s revenge on Claudius. Hamlet’s great argument was that his father was killed by Claudius, and his beloved mother, who was as bright as the sun, fell under Claudius’ darkness. Hamlet creates his own paradox- “to be or not to be” that he has the right reason for revenge, but he is too hesitant and scared to end Claudius’ life due to the consequence of murdering the King of Denmark.

In consideration of this, Act 4 presents more of the perspective of Hamlet’s attempt to bring the question of morality into consideration, which further follows into Act 5. Troubled by his own perspective towards life, Hamlet found himself reviewing it from a whole different perspective. He weighs his perspective on the morality of it, asking himself whether the death of King Claudius will truly bring him peace or peace to his father’s soul. Or is it actually remorse over his father’s death that he considers the ghost to be of his father, or is it simply an apparition that appears to fuel Hamlet’s madness? In light of this, he feigns madness to escape the watchful eyes of the courtiers and King’s men, spying on them all the while.

Deception, Death, and the Final Act

Around the second part of the scene in Act Five, Hamlet discloses his schemes, alerting Horatio of the King's sly plot for him, to which he sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths instead. He also notifies Horatio about his cunningness towards swapping Hamlet's execution letter with that of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern since he shows no mercy for those two, as well. The plot is well riddled with many twists and turns as the story progresses.

Act V presented no surprise as it is enveloped in layers of ambiguity and controversy and obscured to good detail. The first scene of Act V displays two gravediggers who are found to be debating over the burial they have been asked to dig for. The argument between the gravediggers continues over the topic of whether the dead person is fit for a Christian burial or not. The argument between the two is based on the fact that Ophelia drowned herself, and even though the king ordered a full Christian burial, granting full Christian rites to the woman, the first gravedigger still finds it questionable. Hamlet and Horatio appear right after the second gravedigger departs, bringing the first gravedigger's question into consideration. This brings the discussion over to a valid point where the discussion of the gravediggers is linked to how nobles are treated differently, as compared to poor people. The discussion between the gravediggers brings about the discussion topic of religion being unfair and influences brought forth by appearance rather than reality being in focus. Another important element in Act Five is related to Hamlet's confession of loving Ophelia, which he was unable to tell her while she was alive.

Around the second part of the scene in Act Five, Hamlet discloses his schemes, alerting Horatio of his intentions towards crafting a sly plot for the King's murder in England. He also notifies Horatio about his cunningness towards swapping Hamlet's execution letter with that of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern since he shows no mercy for those two, as well. The plot is well riddled with many twists and turns as the story progresses.

Symbolism, Mortality, and Tragic Resolution

Throughout the story of Hamlet, physical objects are rarely noticed since they hold no such thematic representation from the perspective of the plot. However, Yorick's skull is an exceptional case. Hamlet discovers this while at the graveyard, indulging in a conversation with the skull and posing questions about the king's former jester. Eventually, the discussion will revolve around the topic of inevitability and the slow decomposition of the body. Hamlet is found to be making a formal request of the skull and urging it with emphasis, "Get you to my lady's chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favor she must come," which can be perceived as his conclusive thought towards death being inescapable and inevitable in the end. Furthermore, he interacts with the skull while running his fingers around the edges of the skull's mouth, mentioning, "Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft," which can be related to Hamlet's fascination with the physical consequences one

bore because of death (Eliot 1920). The second part makes out an essential motif since Hamlet has been found to be referencing it by describing the inevitable decay every human body will go through eventually.

The plot for Hamlet follows many themes since he is found to be quite uncertain about the actions he wishes to take while he is continuously faced with ambiguity. His indecisiveness is evident from continuously postponing the action he is supposed to take. Postponing it till he gathers more knowledge based on how he should carry himself forward to cultivate the fruit of his labor or to put his plans into action. This can be an important aspect of Hamlet since he depicts the main characteristics of uncertainty and indecision.

The story presents a plot that qualifies as one of the masterworks of Shakespeare. The plot is well thought out, and representations of how uncertainty and mystery are associated with death are seen in a profound manner throughout Hamlet's expressions. He even discloses how life is fragile, and the fact that death is inevitable. Every mortal being is eventually going to die and decay. Hamlet follows many themes since he is found to be quite uncertain about the actions he wishes to take while he is continuously faced with ambiguity. His indecisiveness and repeated questioning of himself are evident from his continuous postponement of the action he is supposed to take. Hamlet finds himself in doubt in most parts but eventually avenges his father at the cost of his life. He stabs his uncle, King Claudius, and forces him to drink from the goblet that had poison in it.

References

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