Tragedy Morality and Death in Shakespeare's Hamlet

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Introduction

The play "Hamlet," authored by Shakespeare, with his superior skills, displays a masterpiece through which he reflects on various themes underlying our society as well. The overwhelming theme of tragedy is prominently shown throughout the play, circling around the life of Hamlet, the tragic experience that befalls him with the news of his father's death, towards the extent of him harboring murderous schemes to exact his revenge on his uncle, the king. The plot, inclusive of twists and turns, piques the viewer's and reader's interest as they become further involved with the story of Hamlet. Shakespeare goes into great detail to explain each and every detail, setting out the scenes in a proper way to enable the viewer or reader to accurately relate to both the physical scenario and the emotional state of each development. Morality presents a weight on one's consciousness till one comprehends the true meaning behind life and death.

Discussion

Shakespeare elaborates on the importance and perspective of both life and death, providing an educated and detailed view of each. This is evident from Hamlet's opening, which contains a scenario of death. Hamlet, while staying in Germany for his education, is informed of his father's death to which he is summoned back in Denmark, however, finding out that his mother "Gertrude" is already betrothed to Claudius, his father's brother, and their new king. He is disgusted by it and calls it "foul incest" and is determined to solve the mystery of his father's murder. Later on in the play, Hamlet learns of the truth from a ghost, who directs Hamlet to avenge his death. Ever since this encounter, Hamlet is focused on killing his uncle, King Claudius, to avenge the murder of his father and let his father's ghost be at ease in his afterlife.

In consideration of the story of Hamlet that follows on in the story after, it becomes quite evident that Hamlet suffers from a fatal flaw. This flaw consumes his overall character and causes him to be subjected to this definite flaw that holds him back from giving form to his schemes all along as the play progresses with each development. In a close comparison with the thematic analysis presented by Aristotle for themes of tragedy and the scenario that fulfills this criterion, Hamlet seems to have a proper understanding of his flaw since the beginning. His major flaw of being indecisive is evident

from his continuous oscillation between his decisions and his repeated moments of questioning his methods and their morality. This, however, reflects a plus point towards Hamlet's personality since he has understood the value of life from these experiences and needs to reconfirm whether he is killing the right person. In a broader sense, this flaw might display a positive attribute of his personality, but at the same time, it becomes quite frustrating as Hamlet, with his wavering resolve, which builds up at times, is suddenly brought down by his self-devised doubts and questions.

Thematic Overview

The play engrosses the reader and viewer's attention with the inclusion of various themes that lay the layout in perfect synergy. Each theme is properly thought out and depicts things to keep the plot well intact while educating the reader on different events that are carried out. Among the themes gaining a dominant spotlight include but are not limited to morality, madness, women, and political livelihood. Although the theme of morality gaining more of an edge over the other themes relates closely to most of the events in the play. A scene depicting Hamlet and Horatio's visit to the graveyard on the day of burying Ophelia brings the viewer toward Hamlet's perception of the topic of morality, life, and death, as well as the value associated with each factor. He is found incapable of finding a definite answer to his question of how valuable life truly is, the meaning behind it, and the eventual end of it. The questions evolve further as the plot progresses and more developments build it up. The common questions that arise in his mind can be summarized by his thoughts on the matter of whether one goes to heaven or hell if they are murdered. What happens after people die? And is it true that kings are granted a free pass into heaven?

During Act V, Hamlet's fatigued mind is provided some comfort as he discovers the skull of Yorick, a person he dearly loved and respected, lying in the graveyard. Picking it up and closely analyzing it, he is reminded of the fact that everyone becomes indifferent to differences in the end. At the end of the play, the mere number of bodies, consisting of eight out of nine primary people, does not fully provide the answers for morality for either the viewer or the reader. This can be interpreted as a proper insight into the play, forcing people to further explore and read into the scenario to find clarity to their doubts regarding life and life after death.

Morality & Death

In the play, Shakespeare presents the protagonist with a strong emotional bond towards the morality of life and death, vengeance, and his blind devotion to bringing peace to his dead father's soul. Hamlet is scarred by the tragic news of his father's sudden passing, and his emotions become unsteady by the news of his mother's marriage to his uncle, King Claudius. To add further to it, the visitation from his father's ghost and revealing the truth to him brings Hamlet towards an apparent maddened state. However, he feigns madness to avoid detection of his obvious intentions of killing his uncle and to avert everyone's attention from his actual scheme. Hamlet is also haunted by the

thought of life and death, the continued question posed towards the physical aspect of death, as he finds the skull of his dear beloved and most respected friend “Yorick,” the various bodies in the cemetery, his grief over Ophelia’s death and the ghost of his father (Desmet 2018).

Death seems to loom around Hamlet, at each nook and corner of his life. Beginning with the death of his father, Hamlet’s emotional state sees a decline as it gets propelled further as he is attending the funeral of his beloved Ophelia and the discovery of Yorick’s skull. This compels him to preview the notion of death from various aspects. It becomes further evident from Act 3, Scene 1 where Hamlet presents his understanding, a critical thought for life and his dominating pretense in regards to the conceptual ideology for taking one’s own life. He finds himself trapped in the dilemma of whether he should end his worries and woes by taking his own life or if he should continue to live on because his mind is uncertain of the life that follows hereafter. This can be related to his saying,

“*To be or not to be – that is the question. Whether it is nobler in mind to suffer, the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Or to take arms against a sea of troubles.*”

- William Shakespeare, Hamlet p 3.1.64-7

He finds himself drawing a conclusion towards his questions with the response that people fear death and their decision to live is purely dependent on the ambiguity towards what lies in wait for them in the life hereafter. Hamlet is also found quoting.

“To die, to sleep – To sleep, perchance to dream – ay, there’s the rub, For in this sleep of death what dreams may come…”

- William Shakespeare, Hamlet

Associating the concept of death, that of an eternal sleep, with the state in which the dead are is what confuses Hamlet’s mind. Continuously chasing after an answer for the morality in death, he stumbles on various discoveries along the way. Death, for him, is a conclusion of one’s journey, their sorrows, their worries, and whichever burdens their life shouldered.

Conclusions

Conclusively, it can be stated that a deeper analysis of the plot and themes of Hamlet grants detailed insight into various aspects people oversee in their daily lives. The aspect of death, especially, is one aspect that society as a whole has looked over with other things they deem to be worthy of their attention. The play engrosses the reader and viewer’s attention by including various themes that lay out in perfect synergy. The themes gaining a dominant spotlight include but are not limited to morality, madness, women, and political livelihood. Death seems to loom around Hamlet, at each nook and corner of his life. Hamlet finds himself trapped in the dilemma of whether he should end his worries and woes by taking his own life or should he continue to live on because his mind is uncertain

of the life that follows hereafter. A close comparison with the thematic analysis presented by Aristotle for themes of tragedy and the scenario that fulfills this criterion shows that Hamlet seems to have a proper understanding of his flaw from the beginning. Shakespeare elaborates on the importance and perspective of both life and death, providing an educated and detailed view of each.

Works Cited

Desmet, Christy. “The Dread Of Something After Death”: Hamlet And The Emotional Afterlife.” Actes des congrès de la Société française Shakespeare 36 (2018): n. pag. Web.