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Morality and craft of insanity in hamlet character

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Abstract

Hamlet, one of William Shakespeare's most complex and iconic characters, grapples with themes of morality and the craft of feigned insanity throughout the play. The exploration of Hamlet's psyche reveals a character torn between moral dilemmas and a strategic use of madness. Hamlet's character is a fascinating study of the intricate relationship between morality and the craft of insanity. Shakespeare's dramas are amazing expressions of his creativity as a writer, a talent that has stood the test of time. His drama revolves around the idea that human nature is mostly derived from the surrounding environment. This research investigates the madness of the character hamlet in Shakespeare's Hamlet and to show whether he is really mad or no. The paper also shows Hamlet cleverness in using insanity to achieve his goal for revenge and how he uses the madness to achieve morality. This paper studies moral revenge in the play.

Keywords: Shakespeare; Drama; Hamlet; Insanity; Morality

1. Introduction

William Shakespeare's timeless tragedy, "Hamlet," stands as a masterful exploration of the human condition, replete with themes of morality, revenge, and the intricacies of the human psyche. At the heart of this complex tapestry is the enigmatic character of Prince Hamlet, whose internal struggles and strategic machinations propel the narrative forward. This study seeks to unravel the interwoven threads of morality and the craft of insanity within Hamlet's character, delving into the moral ambiguities that define his actions and the deliberate use of feigned madness as a tool for both personal introspection and strategic maneuvering.

As the play unfolds, Hamlet grapples with profound moral dilemmas, presenting a character whose conscience is at once tormented and introspective. The moral ambiguity surrounding Hamlet's decisions, particularly his contemplation of revenge for his father's murder, sets the stage for a nuanced examination of ethical considerations that extend beyond the conventional norms of Elizabethan society.

Simultaneously, Hamlet employs a shrewd and calculated strategy by feigning madness, adding layers of complexity to his character. This study aims to unravel the motivations behind Hamlet's choice to simulate insanity, exploring the psychological dimensions of his actions and the impact of his crafty deceptions on the unfolding tragedy. The intersections of morality and the artful manipulation of madness become focal points through which the character of Hamlet navigates the turbulent waters of love, betrayal, and existential uncertainty.

In dissecting Hamlet's moral compass and the strategic use of feigned madness, we will delve into the consequences of his choices, the toll exacted on his own psyche, and the broader implications for the unfolding tragedy. Through a careful analysis of Shakespeare's text, we aim to shed light on the intricate dance between morality and the craft of insanity, ultimately unraveling the enigma that is Hamlet and the timeless questions his character raises about the human condition.

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Objectives

This paper tries

- To investigate the madness of the character hamlet and to show whether he is really mad or no.
- To focus on Hamlet cleverness in using madness to achieve his goal for revenge.
- To present how Hamlet uses the madness to achieve morality.

1.1. Drama

Drama is an art form that explores human trouble and tension. Usually, it takes the shape of a narrative told to an audience by speech and action. The theatrical aspects of acting, clothes, scenery, music, and sound are used to tell the story. "The form of composition [that is] designed for performance in the theater, in which actors take the roles of the characters, perform the indicated action, and utter the written dialogue," is how M.H. Abrams defines drama. Drama, according to E. Kier, is defined as a particular genre of fiction that is performed. The Greek word "action," which is derived from the verb "to act," is where the word "drama" originates. Actors performing play in front of an audience on a stage require cooperative production methods as well as a group approach to audience reaction. Unlike other literary genres, the structure of dramatic texts is directly impacted by this joint production and collective reception.

Any work intended for actor presentation is considered drama. It is an image of actual or hypothetical persons and events that is shown to the spectators. Although it is a serious performance, it is occasionally used to describe serious real-life occurrences like trials or disasters. The first and most important component of drama is this mimicry, and the audience's presence is the second. In the modern era, drama is seen to be a discourse that is intended to be uttered, and it is something that actors interpret. Drama generally encompasses everything from high comedy to farce, as well as tragedy and melodrama. People attend plays for a variety of reasons, including pure enjoyment and intense emotional experiences. Drama strives to change society by raising awareness of various concerns among people, in addition to providing amusement.

1.2. William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was an English playwright and poet who lived from 1564 until 1616. He is recognized by many as the world's super dramatist and the best writer in English literature. In addition to various other poetry, he composed roughly 37 plays, 154 sonnets, and two lengthy narrative poems. Compared to other playwrights, his plays are produced more frequently and have been translated into every major living language. Shakespeare is credited with founding English theater. He used some prose mixed with blank verse to write his plays. No other English writer can handle love and compassion, language richness and control like he can, and he had unique powers and an incredible insight of human psychology. Shakespeare began writing near the close of the sixteenth century, and the political, social, and literary tendencies of the time are all reflected in his works. His age suggests both the start and the end of the Renaissance. According to historical accounts, this era started with Elizabeth's ascension in 1558 and ended with James I's death in 1625.

Shakespeare took full advantage of the rich literary, dramatic, and cultural milieu of the Renaissance while he lived and wrote. Shakespeare addressed the various cultural sects at the same time through his plays. Everyone, including the monarch, the court, and the nobility, adored his plays. Shakespeare employed the theater to depict Elizabethan society in his plays. Drama and theater's primary and most significant function was to raise public awareness of sociopolitical and sociocultural issues and problems. Thus, they emerged as important tools in Shakespeare's arsenal for reflecting socio-political reality and the shifts that take place in this era. The crowd was entertained and delighted by drama and the theater. The audience and readers assimilated the various concepts, ideas, and situations that the theater presented and communicated.

1.3. About the play

Shakespeare's Hamlet is regarded as one of his greatest tragedies ever. It is the most potent, protracted, and significant tragedy that has influenced writers' works. Shakespeare's most well-liked play during his lifetime was this one. Because of its profound ideas and straightforward style, the Prince of Denmark tragedy serves as a source of inspiration for readers, critics, scholars, and students who read it and reread it. They find it endless and incomprehensible at the same time. The drama's events and incidents are briefly summarized below in order to set the scene for the critical analysis that follows. The prince Hamlet is the child of Queen Gertrude and the late Danish King Hamlet. Following the demise of King Hamlet, his brother Claudius ascends to the throne by marrying King Hamlet's widow, Queen Gertrude of Denmark. Hamlet, the prince, believes Claudius murdered his brother in order to ascend to the Danish throne. This

causes him to psychologically get ready to exact revenge. In order to view the ghost of the late King Hamlet, Marcellus and Barnardo call upon Hamlet's companion Horatio and then Hamlet himself at midnight. The ghost informs Hamlet that his father, King Hamlet, was killed by Claudius by asphyxiating his ear with poison. After learning the truth about his father's murder, Hamlet becomes even more motivated to exact revenge. He begins to plan ways to carry out his father's murderous wishes.

Hamlet experiences a mental breakdown and exhibits odd behavior. Hamlet behaves as though he is insane, but King Claudius doesn't think he is insane out of love or for any other reason. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are sent by King Claudius, his wife Gertrude, and advisor Polonius to spy on Hamlet and determine the reason behind his insane behavior. Ophelia, Polonius' daughter, is cruelly treated by Hamlet. Polonius is led to believe that Hamlet is deeply infatuated with her. Laertes, Polonius's son, is told to travel to France and to forbid Ophelia from hanging around with Hamlet. Claudius believes that Hamlet's insanity has little to do with love. He feels as though there is something weighing heavily on his thoughts. He sends Hamlet to England out of concern that, in his deranged state of mind, Hamlet could attempt to murder him. In an attempt to get Claudius to break down and confess to killing King Hamlet, Hamlet persuades an acting troupe to stage King Hamlet's death in front of Claudius before departing for England.

Claudius is infuriated to see the same story being performed on stage. Although he doesn't acknowledge his wrongdoing, he departs and the queen goes with him. It gives Hamlet confidence over the cause of his father's passing. Hamlet is subsequently told by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that his mother wishes to talk to him right away in her chamber. Polonius informs the king that he will observe Hamlet and his mother from behind the curtain. When Hamlet enters the queen's chamber, he speaks angrily with her. The queen begs for assistance, believing Hamlet will murder her. Additionally, Polonius yells from behind the curtain. When Hamlet hears Polonius, he murders him through the curtain in a fit of rage, thinking the man is Claudius. Upon discovering the truth, he laments Polonius's passing. Claudius nevertheless sent him to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, giving them the directive to murder Hamlet once they there. Unwillingly, Hamlet departs for England.

Laertes comes back from France. He requests information from the king regarding his father's whereabouts. Claudius tells Laertes that his father was killed by Hamlet and motivates him to seek revenge. After experiencing complete insanity upon her father's passing, Ophelia finally collapses into a brook and drowns. Laertes is much angrier after Ophelia's passing. While traveling to England, Hamlet discovers Claudius's orders, which specify that Hamlet is to be put to death. Hamlet reverses the order, declaring that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern ought to die. Pirates take Hamlet hostage. They transport him to Denmark. Thus, Claudius is given the chance to murder Hamlet. He sets up a swordfight between Hamlet and Laertes. The poisoned tip of Laertes' sword is the trick, though. In case Hamlet triumphs, Claudius poisons the victory cup as a backup measure. After winning the first two rounds, Hamlet is given a poisoned drink, which he declines to take since he is so happy about his victory, but his mother Gertrude does take it because she is so happy for him. The queen eventually perishes, crying out that she was poisoned. Laertes uses the poisoned sword to scratch Hamlet during the third bout, but Hamlet unintentionally switches weapons with Laertes, cutting and poisoning him. Prior to passing away, he informs Hamlet of Claudius' betrayal. Claudius is fatally stabbed by Hamlet, who then perishes. Hamlet starts his last speech. Horatio is so depressed that he wants to end his life, but Hamlet begs him to tell everyone about the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and King Hamlet. The prince of Norway, Fortinbras, arrives after conquering England. In his final breath, Hamlet wishes for Fortinbras to succeed him as King of Denmark.

1.4. Feigned Insanity of Hamlet

Shakespeare writes a lot about madness in Hamlet, even if retribution is the play's most overt topic. Readers are left wondering if Hamlet is insane as the play goes on because the thin line separating sanity from madness becomes hazier. This essay aims to explore the question of whether Hamlet is acting insane or if he is actually insane. For centuries, academics have been discussing whether Hamlet is sane. Hamlet's sudden mood swings and unpredictable behavior are cited by those who think he was actually insane as evidence that his father's passing drove him insane.

Hamlet is acting crazy. When acting crazy isn't necessary, Hamlet presents himself as absolutely normal. When, during the play, he tells Horatio to keep an eye out for any indications of guilt in Claudius, he says

“Give him heedful note;

For I mine eyes will rivet to his face,

And after we will both our judgments join

In censure of his seeming (ACT3, Scene2 .87)."

He speaks to Horatio in a reasonable manner. Because Horatio is one of the few people he does not have to prove he is "insane," he does not try to do so. He also sounds very composed and genuine when giving the players acting instructions. For example, he asks

"You could, for a need,

Study a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines, which

I would set down and insert in't, could you not (Act2, scene2 .565)?"

Like all of his instructions, his query is straightforward and easy to comprehend, and it appears that the player is at ease with Hamlet and his requests. Reason would consider Hamlet logical since it is far more likely that a sane man could portray an insane one than an insane man could play a sane one.

Another indication that Hamlet must be sane is the fact that, despite his seeming insanity, he is perceptive in his words and retorts and fully comprehends the circumstances surrounding him. He portrays his crazy persona almost too effectively, and every word he says seems to be an attempt to explain his insanity or perplex his enemies. Not only is Hamlet perceptive enough to understand Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's genuine motivation for their visit, but he also assures them—in a way that would be deemed insane—that he is not truly insane!

"I am but mad north-north-west. When the wind is

Southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw (Act 2.scene 2.401)".

Because of his delusional insanity, Hamlet is able to play with his two companions and, as a result, avoid having his intentions and ideas questioned. Later, with the use of his father's seal and a method too clever for even a sane man, let alone an insane one, he is even able to have them executed in his place. In fact, Hamlet is so inventive in his responses to portray a crazed face in the previously described conversation with Polonius.

Act 3 scene IV, when Hamlet tells his mother that he is not insane but rather mad in craft, is another piece of evidence supporting his sanity " That I essentially am not in madness, But mad in craft (Hamlet, Act 3. Scene 4 Lines 187-188)". This is an admission to his mother that he is acting insane, and he begs her not to tell Claudius about it so he may keep serving his actual purpose. Unfortunately for Hamlet, Claudius doesn't think Hamlet is crazy himself. Throughout the play, Hamlet maintains his sanity and used his pretended lunacy to deceive Claudius and his allies. Hamlet merely employs the false pretense of insanity to attempt to achieve his aim of retribution; he never shows evidence of being insane in the play. act 1, Scene 5, where Hamlet intends to play insane in order to confound his foes and reveal the identities of his true friends, provides additional proof. You've been sent for by the noble King and Queen, I know that. Hamlet understands at once that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern don't intend to give him a friendly visit; rather, they are a disguise for the previous Danish monarch, who is trying to figure out why Hamlet has gone insane.

He considers the same internal conflict in each of his soliloquies as a rational individual would. For example, he intends to watch the king during the performance he created for his own purposes, after realizing that his father's ghost might have been the devil in disguise. "I'll have these players play something like the murder of my father before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks; I'll tent him to the quick...The spirit that I have seen maybe a devil... (Act 2.scene 2.623)." In case he is biased, Hamlet even asks Horatio to watch alongside him. I believe that a lunatic could not have possessed the insight, logic, or possibly even the ability to think in such a well-organized way. Another argument for Hamlet's insanity is the way he interacts with his mother, however this is unfair criticism. He has many reasons to be angry with the woman, not the least of which is that she married Claudius quickly following the death of her first husband. Though impolite and immature, Hamlet's actions do not indicate that he is insane.

There are multiple instances where Hamlet's sanity is demonstrated. Act I fifth scene features Hamlet saying, "How strange or odd some'er I bear myself." He tells Horatio that he intends to act insane in order to get the freedom to decide whether or not Claudius is to blame for his father's passing. He may appear less dangerous and divert attention from his research by acting like a lunatic. Despite their peculiarities, Hamlet's acts do not appear to be consistent with true madness, as both Claudius and Polonius acknowledge. Even Polonius remarks, "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't," suggesting that Hamlet's peculiar actions appear to have a purpose. Because of his cleverness and ability to play a crazy person, Hamlet comes out as too clever to be truly insane. Ultimately, Hamlet exhibits insane behavior

only in the presence of specific characters. When he is around Claudius, Ophelia, Polonius, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Gertrude, his insanity manifests itself. When Hamlet is among Francisco, Bernardo, and Horatio, he acts normally. He wouldn't be able to keep such tight rein on his actions if he were really insane.

1.5. Morality of Hamlet

The archetypal representative of humanism throughout the Renaissance is Hamlet. He possesses the admirable traits of a skeptical thinker who is also an academic. He possesses the capacity to weigh all alternatives, queries, and possible courses of action. The fact that he has such introspective traits has added to the time it has taken him to exact revenge for the death of his father. Some critics contend that the delay is real and not the product of the reader's imagination. Morality has been shown through the delay of his revenge. The delay took place to achieve moral revenge and search the truth.

Because Hamlet's retaliation is connected to the monarch personally, there are a few reasons why his delay may be acceptable. If he had to accuse the king publicly of being the murderer, all he had to go on was a ghost story and no hard proof. In addition, the king is constantly encircled by guards, making it impossible for Hamlet to approach him to exact revenge. Vengeance has far-reaching social and political consequences that impact the entire country. Hamlet's initial response to the death of his father was hampered by these thoughts about the terrible repercussions of the retaliation. If one were to view revenge as the play's locus-standi, a variety of relevant associations could be brought to light. Hamlet illustrates the difficulties with retribution morality, despite the fact that revenge may appear like a straightforward way to bring order back to Denmark.

In an effort to honor his late father and fulfill his duty as a son, Hamlet is eager to exact retribution. Occasionally, though, he views retaliation as an insane, vicious act that harms everyone. In the midst of chaos, Hamlet tries to act on his ideas but is unable to do so. Hamlet muses in his well-known soliloquy, "To be, or not to be, that is the question," about whether it is better to accept life's setbacks and battle against them or to take his own life. Nonetheless, there is an alternative reading of the soliloquy that may be made, according to which Hamlet is considering whether or not to murder Claudius rather than whether or not to kill himself. But the play exposes Claudius' corruption, even though he ought to be the epitome of justice. Even though taking revenge is seen as a sacred and morally required act, there is a subtle dramatic complexity to the act.

Thus, Hamlet's moral concerns crucify his need for vengeance. When the Ghost informs Hamlet of Claudius's guilt, Hamlet at first finds it hard to believe. Hamlet, the prince, broods after knowing that Claudius actually killed his late father, the king. His soliloquies make clear that taking retribution is occasionally justified as a responsibility, an honorable act a son should do to show his father how much he cares. He immediately decided to take revenge. He says :

Haste me to know't, that I with wings as swift

As meditation or the thoughts of love

May sweep to my revenge (Act I scene V, 29-31)."

Here, Hamlet feels fully justified in his emotions and acknowledges that his retaliation is morally correct. Even though Hamlet is capable of carrying out revenge, he delays carrying it out because he muses too much over its moral implications. The primary motivation for Hamlet's retaliation is morality. For example, he does not kill his uncle when he encounters him at prayer; instead, he goes back. Even though his uncle was by himself and unprotected, he chooses not to get revenge. Hamlet postponed the retaliation due to moral issues rather than a lack of ability. He says :

"No might I do it pat, now a is a-praying.

And now I'll do it.

And so a goes to heaven;

And so am I reveng'd. That should be scann'd:

A villain kills my father, and for that

I, his sole son, do this same villain send

To heaven (Act 3 scene III, 72-78)"

Hamlet exhibits his immediate reaction to his father's murder, which is his resolve to take revenge, but he dwells on it excessively. He feels that killing Claudius while he is praying is a sin of execution in a holy moment and that the victim will enter paradise. This indicates that he is not mentally ready to take revenge for his father's murder and instead wants to reward the offender.

2. Conclusion

The protagonist of Hamlet is presented in this essay as rational. I believe that Hamlet is merely acting insane; he is not actually insane. Shakespeare's primary character, Hamlet, is forced to take revenge for the death of his father throughout the play. In an attempt to get the chance to murder Claudius in a way that is morally acceptable, he makes the decision to act insane. His portrayal of a crazy grows more plausible as the performance goes on, and the characters around him respond appropriately. But based on his inner monologue and the reasons he seems to be acting out, it's evident that he's not actually insane and is only acting insane to satisfy his father's demands as an actor. He keeps up his act of insanity because it makes it possible for him to carry out his stated goals. Although Hamlet frequently deals with madness, the title character does not exhibit the traits of real insanity. In order to explore his father's death without raising any red flags with Claudius, Hamlet deliberately changes his behavior. Although Claudius kills his brother, he knows full well that what he did was wrong and immoral.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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