

Revenge Theme in Shakespeare's Hamlet and Mahfouz's

The Thief and the Dogs

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Abstract

This study explores the revenge theme in Shakespeare's play Hamlet and Mahfouz's novel The Thief and the Dogs by discovering similarities and differences between the two works. First, this paper is examining the meaning of the word revenge from a linguistic and social perspective, and gives a brief summary of both works, in addition to a short biography of Naguib Mahfouz and its impact on the novel. Second, this paper demonstrates the elements and reasons that created revenge in both works through the analysis of the texts in detail. Finally, illustrating the political and social dimensions of both workers, and its effect on the individual, which resulted in the tendency to take revenge from the others and the ruling class.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Mahfouz, revenge, Hamlet, Thief and Dogs

1. Introduction

Revenge has historically been a popular literary theme and keeps playing a role in contemporary literary works. Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* and Naguib Mahfouz's novel *The Thief and The Dogs* are entirely based on vengeance to achieve justice from their point of view. Justice is generally served in modern times and most of the crimes and wrongdoings are reprovved and punishments are given. There are few who go beyond the rules and take justice into their own hands. Thus, revenge is characterized as an act of harming a person or group in response to a grievance, and usually to achieve justice in illegal ways, using their own hands ("revenge", 2019). Bacon (2011) stated that "Revenge is a kind of wild justice; which the more man's nature runs to, the more ought law to weed it out. For as for the first wrong, it doth but offend the law" (p. 384).

Hamlet is a play written by Williams Shakespeare. Taylor (2002) stated that it's one of his most famous works during his time and still one of his most successful works, the play's main theme is revenge, resulting in several innocent people's deaths (pp. 2-8). The author focused on Prince Hamlet's problems that are portrayed as elegant rather than his uncle's evil deeds. At the beginning of the play, king Hamlet's ghost appears to Prince Hamlet, telling him that

he was poisoned by King Claudius. Prince Hamlet laments both the death of his father and the remarriage of his mother to the new King Claudius that took place a few weeks after the death of the late king. Then Hamlet tries to find out the real truth about the death and plot revenge of his father. Hamlet acts insane and deceives a lot of people in the process of finding out the truth to hide his true intentions.

On the other hand, Naguib Mahfouz was born into a Muslim Egyptian family of the lower middle class in 1911. Was the first Arabic Egyptian author who won the Nobel Prize in literature (Mahfouz, 1988). Gordon (1990) explained that He is considered to be one of the first contemporary authors of Arabic literature to discuss the concepts of existentialism, along with Taha Hussein, Most of Mahfouz's works deal primarily with politics and in many of his novels, he described the social situation of Egypt at that time (pp. 4-6). He was dissatisfied by the 1952 revolution and the defeat of Egypt in the 1967 war. Because Egypt was under military martial law and his bad relationship with the authority, he was unable to write openly and clearly. Hence, the novel *The Thief and the Dogs* is a novel that metaphorically expresses the Egyptian reality. He died on August 30, 2006.

According to Gordon (1990), the novel *The Thief and the Dogs* is a post-revolutionary haunting novel by Naguib Mahfouz combines a dynamic psychological portrait of a sorrowful man with a detective story, suspense, and rapid pace (p. 135). The skilled young thief Said Mahran emerges bent on revenge after four years in jail. Egypt has witnessed a revolution, and now his beloved wife and loyal henchman, who connived to betray him to the authorities, are married now to each other, holding from him his six-year-old daughter. Yet his mentor, Rauf Ilwan, once a revolutionary hardliner who persuaded Said that, stealing from the wealthy in an unjust society is an act of justice, is now a wealthy man himself, a successful newspaper editor who has anything to do with the disgraced Said. When Said's insane efforts to achieve his concept of justice were badly misfired, his desire for revenge led to numerous innocent people being killed. He becomes such a hunted man motivated by hatred and vengeance that his last opportunity at redemption can only be realized too late.

2. Revenge Elements

In both literary works, there were many causes and circumstances that compounded the concept of revenge, if these elements did not exist, the two protagonists in both works might refrain from revenge. The theme of revenge was developed by Mahfouz and Shakespeare through dialog or internal conflict, and the use of eye language throughout the novel and the play, for example, in *The Thief and the Dogs* Mahfouz demonstrate that “Bring in her mother, you mean. How I wish our eyes could meet, so I might behold one of the secrets of hell! O, for the axe and the sledgehammer!” (Mahfouz, 1989, p. 21). Also, “Everyone looked on with malicious interest” (Mahfouz, 1989, p. 22).

The first spark that gave rise to the idea of revenge in the novel of *The Thief and The Dogs* when Said Mehran came out of prison and went straight to see his daughter after more than four years in prison. Mehran's meeting with his daughter was his only hope in life and represent a new beginning for him but the reality was otherwise, as Mahfouz (1989) illustrates that:

She shrank back even further. He pulled her towards him almost forcibly then she screamed, and as he drew her closer, fought back, crying. He leant forward to kiss her, disregarding his failure and disappointment, but his lips caught only a whirling arm. (p. 22).

His daughter Sana was frightened and terrified then she rejects him, this was the first reason for Said Mehran's growing idea of revenge.

On the other hand, in Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, the appearance of the ghost was the most important catalyst for the idea of revenge, and at the same time symbolizing fate. Thus, when the ghost spoke to Hamlet revealing his true identity "I am thy father's spirit, doomed for a certain term to walk the night and for the day confined to fast in fires till the foul crimes done in my days of nature are burnt and purged away" (Shakespeare, 1987, p. 185), asking him to take revenge on his brother Claudius, who poisoned King Hamlet, that ignited the first spark of revenge in Hamlet's mind.

2.1 The need for someone to provide reassurance and confidence.

Under the general situation of the two literary works, of betrayal, treachery, and revenge, the urgent need for someone to rely on by both protagonists to justify the idea of revenge they have, and to help them to achieve that revenge. In *The Thief and the Dogs*, Said was in desperate need of someone he trusted, providing him with protection that encouraged him to revenge after being betrayed by all. At the time Said was expelled, insulted, and threatened by Rauf Alwan, and betrayed by his henchman Ilish, who stole everything Said, had his wife, daughter, and money. The most severe betrayal is the betrayal of the love of his life, his wife Nabawiyya, who divorced Said, during his imprisonment and married Ilish, his treacherous assistant (Hassan, 2012, p. 145). In the midst of all this, Nur, the prostitute was the only person who stood with Said Mahran in his ordeal. For example, when he was on the run from the police and in distress, she stood at his side in everything, "food, drink, and news. She kissed him and, for the first time, he responded spontaneously, with a sense of gratitude, knowing her now to be the person closest to him for as long as he might live" (Mahfouz, 1989, p. 114).

In the play of *Hamlet*, loyalty is an extremely rare trait in this play, the characters in this play have spent their time betraying each other, the only person who was faithful to Hamlet is Horatio. Their relationship represents the only true friendship and loyalty in this play, Horatio was the only person Hamlet relied on. He seems to be the one to whom Hamlet entrusted the substance of his conversation with the Ghost, and who knows that Claudius assassinated Hamlet's father in order to seize the throne. The reader can observe this loyalty, through Hamlet's converse of Horatio, Shakespeare (1987):

Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice, and could of men distinguish her election, sh'hath seal'd thee for herself; for thou hast been as one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing, a man that fortune's buffets and rewards has ta'en with equal thanks.... (P. 251)

Hamlet idolizes Horatio because of the characteristics, Hamlet does not possess himself, throughout the rest of the play, Horatio acts as a true friend to Hamlet and proves his complete loyalty when he tries to commit suicide to at the very end to join Hamlet in death,

referring to himself as “I am more an antique Roman than a Dane” (Shakespeare, 1987, p. 351), that he cannot live without his beloved friend.

2.2 Killing innocent people in pursuit of revenge.

The element of anxiety and psychological disorder, which resulted from betrayal, was the first cause in both literary works of killing many innocent people. In *The Thief and the Dogs*, Said Mahran murdered an innocent man, called Shaban living in Ilish's flat, assuming he was Ilish. Biyomy (2015) explained that Said Mehran's revenge was directed at his wife Nabawiyya, and his traitor friend Ilish Sidra, but they left the apartment, being substituted by another tenant, Shaban was just a simple worker, he had no guilt, except that he moved to Ilish's apartment (p. 386). Said Mehran could not resist his remorse after he saw Shaban's picture in the newspapers, “I wonder who you are, Shaban. We never knew each other. Did you have children? Did you ever imagine that one day you would be killed for no reason--that you'd be killed because Nabawiyya Sulaiman married Ilish Sidra?” (Mahfouz, 1989, p. 82). Said continued his pursuit for revenge when Said went to Rauf's Villa to kill him. He doesn't notice that the man he shoots is not Rauf, but actually the doorkeeper. At the end of the novel, Said Mehran destroyed Nur, making her lost and wanted by the police, because he made her live in the illusion of love with him, she loves a stalker, which his end is well known. On the other hand, Said Mahran has ruined the reputation of his daughter Sana, it is difficult for any girl to live in an eastern society while her father is a serial killer (Biyomy, 2015, p. 204).

In Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, there were many victims because of the madness of revenge, Hamlet kills Polonius, mistaking him for Claudius, hidden behind a curtain. He felt no regret, he could see nothing but the vengeance for his father's murder, after the murder of Polonius, Hamlet illustrate that “Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell I took thee for they better” (Shakespeare, 1987, p. 278). Then, at the end of the play, Hamlet killed Laertes with a poisoned sword. Hamlet also caused the death of his childhood friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, when their ship is attacked by pirates, he returns to Denmark, make them facing death on their own. He has also involved indirectly in his love Ophelia's deaths when she drowned, as Gertrude described “clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke, when down her weedy trophies and herself fell in the weeping brook” (Shakespeare, 1987, p. 319). Also, Hamlet was the cause of Gertrude's indirectly death when she poisoned by Claudius by mistake.

2.3 Infidelity as a cause for revenge

The first and last main driver for revenge is betrayal, both literary works centered on treachery, and one of its results is vengeance. In *The Thief and the Dogs*, Nabawiyya's betrayal of Said Mehran was one of the main factors that encouraged the idea of revenge in his mind. After she divorced him, she stole everything that Said stole before, and gave it to her lover Ilish, even deprived him of his daughter Sana. She also participated in the ambush that her lover and Rauf Ilwan orchestrated, which resulted in Said Mahran being jailed for four years.

In Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, Ophelia has deceived him in Hamlet's view by sharing his private letters of love with his uncle Polonius. He treats her cruelly saying that "get thee to a nunnery" (Shakespeare, 1987, p. 243), and then he caused her madness, Hamlet's mother Gertrude, betrays Hamlet and the late King Hamlet by marrying to Claudius, Hamlet, being still depressed about his father's death was further upset and felt betrayed by his mother when she quickly married Claudius. Also, by marrying her former husband's brother, she also betrayed the late King Hamlet.

2.4 Reject the Idea if Revenge

In *The Thief and the Dogs*, Mahfouz tried to send messages through the secondary characters in the novel to reject the idea of revenge in the voice of reason. He started with the detective, who said during Said Mehran's first meeting with Ilish Sidra, at his home after his release from prison "Let the judge decide that ... just as I pointed out at the beginning. There's no more to be said. It's up to a court of law." (Mahfouz, 1989, p. 23). After her daughter rejects him, he went to Sheikh Ali Al-Guneidi, so that he may find a justification for his idea or a fatwa that allows him to pursue his revenge. But he found the same words the detective told him before. Then, Sheikh Al-Guneidi suggests to him that "Take a copy of the Koran and read ... wash yourself now and read" (Mahfouz, 1989, p. 31) but he refuses "just got out of jail today, and I have not performed the prayer ablutions" (Mahfouz, 1989, p. 31).

In Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, some critics pointed out that Hamlet's delay in killing his uncle and achieving revenge, was morally motivated, and Shakespeare highlighted it, to show the moral side of his protagonist "Haste me to know it, that I, with wings as swift as meditation or the thoughts of love, may sweep to my revenge" (Shakespeare, 1987, p. 186). Although many critics rejected this point of view, despite the tragic end of both heroes. Both writers, in one way or another, rejected the idea of revenge. This confirmed a moral aspect for the audiences or readers.

3. The Similarity in Both Works from a Political Perspective

Both literary works representing a political dimension, Mahfouz's novel *The Thief and the Dogs* described the tragic situation in Egypt, under the bloody dictatorship in the 1950s and 1960s. And Shakespeare *Hamlet's* play, consider a reflection of Denmark and England's general situation under the royal rule.

Each character of *The Thief and The Dogs* represents a symbol in Egyptian society, for example, Said Mehran, a simple orphan young man, who is deceived by the principles of the 1952 revolution, represents the simple, destitute class of Egyptian society. Nabawiyya's character, with her moral deviation and her betrayal to her husband, represents moral decay in the whole of society. that occurred after the revolution in Egypt. While, Rauf Ilwan, represents the ruling military authority. The attempt to avenge Said Mehran against Rauf Ilwan is nothing more than a form of revenge against the corrupt system, and the betrayal of his wife and assistant Ilish Sidra is a picture of the deterioration of social values in Egyptian society. Also, through the character of Said Mahran, Mahfouz tried to raise the conflict between the rich and the poor classes in Egyptian society, and the inevitability of

confrontation between the two classes, as well, the growth of the idea of revenge among the poor class against the rich. (Ismael, 2018, p. 5).

Hamlet was written during a period of political fear and uncertainty that has similarities in the play's mood as well as events. The play was performed for the first time in 1602 when Queen Elizabeth I was 68 years old. She had no children; it was unclear who would inherit her crown after she died. By naming an heir, Elizabeth might have put an end to uncertainty. But she declined to do so, leading to the widespread belief that in her old age the once-popular queen had become reckless. The royal succession is undetermined in Hamlet's Denmark, as it is in England.

Shakespeare's contemporaries assumed that a kingdom's health relied on the health of its royal family: in Denmark as in the England of Shakespeare, the royal family has weakened, and the kingdom as a whole is affected. In Shakespeare's England, the country's ruler was also the literal embodiment of the country itself. Elizabeth I wasn't just the Queen of England, she was England. The queen was getting older and sick, and she had no children to inherit the empire. Her family's going to end with her. In Hamlet's Denmark, a similar mood prevails. The apparent heir, Hamlet wants to kill both Claudius and himself, leaving Denmark without a successor. Hamlet does not show any interest in having children himself, he asks Ophelia "Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners" (Shakespeare, 1987, p. 243). The Queen, Gertrude, is now too old to bear children like Elizabeth Denmark's royal family is no longer healthy so the monarchy is no longer either "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (Shakespeare, 1987, p. 184). Elizabeth I's reluctance to name a successor generated possibility for ambitious young nobles: another source of political turmoil in Shakespeare's England when Hamlet was written was the uncertainty that could cause and bloodshed the ambition. Therefore, all this led to the growing idea of revenge, among the people against the Queen, for being indifferent to the Kingdom, and the neighboring regions as well.

4. Conclusion

Revenge was the first and last cause of the tragic end of both heroes. Tragic events were the main reason that creates the idea of revenge in both literary works. For example, treachery was the reason for entrenching the principle of revenge. In *Hamlet*, killing the king Hamlet by his brother Claudius, to seize the throne, the betrayal of Hamlet's mother to her husband by marrying quickly the killer, Ophelia's betrayal for the prince Hamlet, as well as his close the betrayal of his friends, all this has led to the growing idea of revenge in the play *Hamlet*.

On the other hand, in Mahfouz's novel, betrayal was the main factor that the growing idea of revenge, for instance, the betrayal of Nabawiyya to her husband Said, as well as the treachery of Ilish Sidra to his master, who gave him help, shelter and food. and the conspiracy of Rauf Ilwan with Nabawiyya and Ilish to put Said in jail, while Said was an obedient servant to Rauf. Also, the shock of Said after his release from prison, when his daughter did not recognize him and rejected him. all these were reasons to establish the idea of revenge in the novel.

Allah has allowed us to avenge and achieve justice, but according to the conditions and regulations, set by the Islamic religion, the reader can observe that in his saying "So whoever

has assaulted you, then assault him in the same way that he has assaulted you. And fear Allah and know that Allah is with those who fear Him.” (The Qur'an 2:194), but many misunderstandings of this Verse and Said Mahran one of those who did not understand the outline of the verse and the way to achieve justice.

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