

A Close Focus into the Inner World and Mind of William Shakespeare's Hamlet

Halilcan KOÇAK
Istanbul Aydın University
Turkey
halilcan_05@hotmail.com

Abstract

William Shakespeare's longest play Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, has been a point of focus of critics for centuries. What makes Hamlet so popular and perennial is its intricate structure and oblivion message in terms of what the real doctrine behind the work is. Hamlet's inner world has still remained unsolved though a number of interpretation studies have been conducted. The murder of the former king triggers Hamlet to change his character. It is seen that this change is actually what makes the work a deep pit. His plans and actions are formed by the sentiments that he gets as a result of discovering his father's murder and his mother's affair with his uncle, the murderer at the same time. The more he discovers, the deeper he gets into both emotionally and mentally. In order to shed more light on Hamlet and the work, his emotional progression and state of mind were analyzed and interpreted in depth in this study.

Keywords: William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Reasoning, Madness

Öz

William Shakespeare'in en uzun oyunu olan Danimarka Prensi Hamlet, yüzyıllardır eleştirmenlerin odak noktası olmuştur. Hamlet'i bu kadar popüler ve mütemadi kılan şey, yapısının arkasındaki gerçek öğretinin ne olduğu, girift yapısı ve iletmek istediği mesajdır. Hamlet'in iç dünyası üzerinde çok sayıda yorum ve çalışma gerçekleştirilmesine rağmen, bu konu hala tam anlamıyla çözümlenemiştir. Eski kralın öldürülmesi, Hamlet'i karakterini değiştirmesini tetikler. aslında bu değişim, Hamlet eserini dipsiz bir kuyu yapan şeydir. Hamlet'in planları ve eylemleri, babasının katli ve annesinin, amcasıyla olan ilişkisinin bir sonucu olarak ortaya çıkan duygular tarafından şekillenir. Hamlet, olayları keşfettikçe, duygusal ve zihinsel olarak o kadar derinleşir. Karakterine ve esere daha fazla ışık tutabilmek için, bu çalışmada, Hamlet'in duygusal gelişimi ve zihinsel durumu analiz edilmiş ve derinlemesine yorumlanmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Muhakeme, Delilik

1. Introduction

As one of the most prominent works of Shakespeare, the tragedy of *Hamlet* might owe its popularity to its uniqueness in the flow of the events, the interwoven relationships and the lessons inside the work. *Hamlet* might have been attributed to a historical background as a literary piece. It is known that Shakespeare used to frequently utilize from history and the imminent people and tales about these people. He is thought to be inspired by a Norse folk tale called Amleth, which was recorded in the 1200s by a Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus. In fact, the word “Amleth” means “stupid”. This gives a message about the character of Hamlet.

What takes our attention mostly while reading the masterpiece is the fact that Hamlet’s inner world, his experience and feelings can be felt by readers closely along with other characters. It can be said that the actions of the characters are quite open to discussion as there can be a wide range of perspectives and aspects changing from one interpretation to another. The relationship of Hamlet with other characters and with himself allows us to understand him better. For instance, if we analyze and relate what Gertrude experiences, it helps us go deep into Hamlet’s inner world. Gertrude can be said to have undergone grave hang-ups. Some can find Gertrude right and innocent for her desire to love Claudius, whereas others might find her desire and her following actions wicked and immoral. However, considering the Elizabethan era ideology, it is inevitable that Gertrude faces male castigation because what we know about Gertrude is mostly told to us by The Ghost and Hamlet. Also, she has a few lines of speeches in the play. Hamlet’s relationship with his mother gets worse and worse as he talks to the Ghost. The more he discovers, the more suspicious and exasperated he becomes against Gertrude. At the same time, Hamlet begins to foster a feeling of hatred against Claudius. In a way, he loses his sanity and strays off reasonable thinking due to his anger and obsession. His ideas are strongly under the emotional pressure. He trusts the Ghost whose identity is even vague. On the contrary, there is also likelihood that the Ghost plays nuntius and Hamlet seems to be unaware of this. Hence, the lack of this probability might bring about various interpretations of Gertrude. Hamlet’s inner turmoil and distress get stronger as he wavers between whether he should take his father's revenge or not. His concerns with right and wrong morality get blurred as he makes new decisions. We can understand most of his feelings and ideas from his soliloquies when he is alone. In different ways, his inner conflict is intertwined with the theme of appearance versus reality.

2. Hamlet’s Sanity and Madness

Hamlet’s sanity or insanity has remained one of the points that has confused the critics’ minds for centuries. His oblivion and unpredicted attitudes in the play also make other characters suspicious about his sanity.

That he is lacking in the element of will, that he is melancholy in his feelings, that his reasoning is often unsound, and in fact so intended by Hamlet himself, is all very true, but does not make out a case of insanity. He assumes madness for a special purpose, and says so when he speaks of his antic disposition; nothing can be plainer than that purpose throughout the play (Snider, 1873, p.73).

The reason why Hamlet prefers madness is due to the fact that he wants to remain out of the boundaries of his own character, so as to get a better connection with others. Hence, playing the mad cannot be truly and directly associated with insanity at this point. On the contrary, playing mad can be an indication of smartness as it serves a purpose. Rather than evaluating his preference or his decision, questioning his character in terms of bad or wise would be better. However, it is obvious that Hamlet has a moral judgment of his ideas before he fulfills any action. Even though he does not take the consequences into consideration, it is seen that he tries to filter the aptness of his actions at least. We can understand this from his soliloquies when he is alone. He confronts his old self and new self. He says:

“Ay, so, God be wi’ ye! Now I am alone.
O! what a rogue and peasant slave am I:
Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion” (Act II, II)

While evaluating the aptness of Hamlet’s actions, his unclear state of mind forces the work to remain a little vague at this point because there are some points that potentially can undermine the reliability of his actions. For example, we can easily understand Hamlet’s willingness to take his father’s revenge from Claudius or we can have a solid reasoning when evaluating his hatred against Gertrude and Claudius. However, what if the Ghost is not a reliable source for him? Is there any clue or evidence whether the Ghost is right or not? There are points that make the work a little complex. The Ghost’s provocative remarks on Gertrude make Hamlet’s mind perplexed and he seems to be dramatically affected by his words. The Ghost is sort of a herald for the future. Thus, Hamlet might trust the Ghost much.

The Ghost is a being for Hamlet. He sees it because he is prepared to see it. It is part of the future he must have in order to resolve his past by his actions in his present. The future, in this case, the coming of the ghost, originates in the desires and fears of the past, and thus the ghost finds a place in Hamlet’s “mind’s eye (Natoli, 1986, p. 94).

It is also probable that Hamlet has a dilemma between what he wants to become and what he experiences. He has a tendency to be easily convinced by the remarks of the Ghost. The Ghost does not render solid evidence about the murder to Hamlet. Yet, he unconditionally believes the Ghost without even questioning the validity and reliability of what the Ghost says. This situation can be caused by the emotional gap that Hamlet has in his inner mind or it can be an indirect result of his overthinking. At this point, he seems to be a little mad. At least, it gives this impression to the readers. The way he expresses his feelings and ideas about his dilemmas force us to assume that he is not behaving with sanity since we witness that he exaggerates what he thinks. In a way, his manner of narration creates an illusion on the readers’ minds.

For the purpose of facilitating his revenge, he feigns madness. But this madness is of a peculiar nature. It is not mental collapse, like that of Ophelia, but a sort of super sanity. It reveals itself in his conduct of fools and those whom he distrusts. Its chief characteristics are fantastic imagination and

phraseology, a calculated irrelevancy of comment, and sardonic wit (Walley, 1933, 778).

Although we do not witness any kind of clue about Claudius's murder of the former king until Hamlet arranges the fake play of the murder, the Ghost gives very harsh and decisive utterances about Claudius. These utterances turn into emotional foundations of Hamlet, which subsequently make him definitely sure about the murder of his father and the betrayal of Gertrude of her former Husband.

“Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts-
O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
So to seduce! - won to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen.” (Act I- Scene V)

From his remarks, the Ghost can be said to have hatred against Claudius and Gertrude, who was once an innocent and beloved wife and Hamlet is deeply affected by these remarks. Although Hamlet's emotions and ideas are undermined by the Ghost, his progression for taking action costs some time. What we see at this point is that Hamlet seems to spend a lot of efforts in contemplating on shaping his actions in accordance with the ideas he gets. In a way, he seems to ignore the consequences. When he takes an action, he prefers to do it without any purpose or intention. He just acts recklessly or he believes that this is the right way. He follows his sensations rather than his reason. In fact, every decision he makes and arranges his actions accordingly due to his sensational inductions relieves himself. These decisions make him believe what he suspected once. He is all alone in the sense of sharing the problems with others. The ghost can be his only companion. He trusts him. Even at the beginning of their conversations, we can see this. Hamlet says:

“I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
That youth and observation copied there;
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmix'd with baser matter: yes, by heaven!
O most pernicious woman! O villain,
villain, smiling, damned villain!” (Act I, IV)

The level of his vengeance gets so fast and severes that he begins to foster an intention of revenge by stating harsh words against his mother. His deep feelings are undermined by what he hears from the Ghost. He does not want to embrace the fact that his mother can have a connection with the murder of the King. This is the point where his suspicions turn into solid ideas and basements of excuse on which he can relate his vengeance. At first, Hamlet is not sure about killing his uncle is the right thing to do or not. He is not decisive and determined to do this because he is not adequately convinced that Claudius deserves death. However, as the conversation goes on, his ideas to kill his uncles get more serious. He is aware that the murder of his father was not his destiny as it was not a natural way of dying. Hamlet tries to associate Claudius with both the burden he has left on his shoulders and the fact that he has a negative influence over Gertrude, which can lead to a gap between himself and his mother. All these unclear assumptions and questions make

Hamlet ponder and distress. This is where we begin to witness the bizarre attitudes of Hamlet. He gets into the self-inducing so much that he even begins to lose his control over his mind.

This madness of Hamlet then, assumed for a specific purpose in the movement of the story, serves also as a relief: the hysterical incoherence of the supposed madman is used to mock king and courtier, and to mock even Ophelia herself, whom in the general hollowness of all appearances Hamlet has come to doubt. With this is combined, as in *Lear*, another form of relief, the real madness of Ophelia, so piteous in its incoherencies (Claude, 1922, p.94)

Rather than observing the reasons for Hamlet's hatred, the process through which he questions himself and others had better be focused. This process results in some drastic changes in his ideas. He condemns Gertrude's desire. Hamlet relates his mother's desire to the corrupt of the idealization of her world. This is mostly where we see assumptions about what is natural or where the proper order comes to form or the idea of a chain of being the hierarchical structure in Renaissance thinking. Hence, Hamlet actually questions more than what is seen. If we look from a broader sense, Gertrude sexual desire and lust are reflected as an agent for mortality instead of procreativity. Because every time her desire becomes the case, an idea of murder or revenge rises in the play.

3. Conclusions

As a conclusion, Hamlet's inner world is undermined by the murder of his father's death as he hears from the Ghost. The vengeance he fosters for his father gets bigger, which subsequently makes serious decisions by even playing the mad. His self-questioning and reasoning often determine the path that he follows. He follows his sensations most of the time. Even though his actions create an image of insanity, his decisions and actions cannot be directly accepted as insane. Rather, they serve a purpose for him. His mother's relationship with Claudius also contributes to the severity of vengeance in his mind. He sometimes finds himself in a quandary about what he should do. His inner clashes are dissolved as he fulfills his actions as a result of his decisions. However, Hamlet's inner world is still open to discussions no matter how different ways of interpretations are made, thereby making Shakespeare's Hamlet a deep pit to be explored.

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