

Shakespeare and Culture: Politics and Society



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Psychoanalysis on Hamlet's Soliloquies in Shakespeare's Play *Hamlet*

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Shakespeare, in his play *Hamlet*, had portrayed the behavior of mind of human beings when they are put into suspicion or worries. He used the technique called soliloquy as a means of revealing the inner working mind of a character. It is a device used to communicate to the audience the secret thoughts of a character's mind. In this play, he presented a number of soliloquies, most of these by the hero Hamlet himself, three by the villain called King Claudius and one by Ophelia. When people face difficult situation, they talk aloud but alone. Those persons are to be treated psychologically. Before the theory was propounded, Shakespeare had revealed the minds of people by using the device named soliloquy. In the play *Hamlet*, Hamlet was mentally disturbed.

The psychological disorders result from Hamlet's mental disturbance. Compulsive obsessive disorder is an abnormal state of mind in which the subject is unconsciously forced to involve in an activity repeatedly. This, usually, is an outcome of some emotional turbulence and needs a clinical treatment. The psychoanalytic theory begins with Freud and Lacan, we'll concentrate just on those two theorists. First developed by Freud in Vienna in the late 19th century, psychoanalysis is a theory of the human mind that describes the mechanisms by which the sexes are divided and formed. In brief, the Oedipus complex is where the male infant conceives the desire to eliminate the father and become the sexual partner of the mother.

Many forms of inter-generational conflict are seen by Freudians as having Oedipal overtones, such as professional

rivalries, often viewed in Freudian terms as reproducing the competition between siblings for parental favour. The Oedipal phase of development is supposed to bring about conformity to social rules of kinship, that is, conformity to the taboo of incest. When a boy realises he cannot have his mother as a sexual partner, he then aspires to the social rights which will grant him his own sexual partner outside the nuclear family. This theory has been heavily criticised for its dependence on heterosexuality and the maintenance of a traditional nuclear family.

Psychoanalytic criticism insists something about how literary texts are actually formed, and reveal something of the meaning of that formation. There are four kinds of psychoanalytical literary criticism. The focus of analysis can be (1) the author of the work; (2) the work's contents; (3) the work's formal construction; or (4) the reader. Freud also explains the difference between what he takes to be an innate universal psychological mechanism and the accepted range of expression of civilization with the notion of repression. This article focuses on the psychoanalysis of the work of Shakespeare's content. It tries to present the psychological conflict between justice and injustice in the mind of the hero with reference to the soliloquies in *Hamlet*. Hamlet's first soliloquy is designed to show his state of mind before meeting the ghost. He is profoundly shocked by Gertrude's marriage to his uncle within two months after her husband's death. Though he did not have suspicion that his father had been murdered or his mother had committed adultery, he was in a state to commit suicide.

The first soliloquy (Act I, Scene ii, lines 129-159) revealed the grief which had been gnawing at his mind. He was unable to understand his mother's remarriage barely after two months after the death of his father. So he was depressed and wanted to end his life by committing suicide if it was not an offence against His laws. He was fed up

with life. He spoke philosophically as if a man speaks philosophically when things go wrong in his life.

Ham: O that this too too solid flesh would melt, . . .
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't, ah fie, 'it's an unweeded garden... (Act I,
Scene ii, 194)

Hamlet compares the world to an 'unweeded garden' in which rank and gross things grow in great abundance. This world is like a badly maintained garden in which the plants and shrubs grow unattended by any gardener. In this garden, weeds and plants which are an unavoidable part of the life of nature are growing in such profusion as to be in complete possession of the whole place. He feels that in this world, all kinds of evil things are going on and it seems to have passed into the hands of the most unscrupulous people.

Hamlet's second soliloquy (Act I, Scene v, lines. 92-112) is on revenge. When a man's mind is disturbed, he loses his virtue. The revenge that a man takes for a wrong done to him by somebody represents an arbitrary kind of justice. The redress of a wrong should be obtained through legal means, but revenge means setting the law at naught. This soliloquy occurs after the appearance of the ghost of his father who was murdered by pouring poison in his ears while he was sleeping. The ghost assigned him the duty of taking revenge upon the murdered of his father. He was standing against his mother saying that his mother as a 'most pernicious woman' and to his uncle as a 'villain'. Shakespeare had beautifully presented the hatred towards wrong deeds and how it affects the character of a hero. Hamlet wanted to take revenge and took decision not to forget his swear made to the ghost.

Hamlet's mind was corrupted by the ghost as Bacon says that taking revenge comes under 'idols' of the mind which must be destroyed. In the essay on *Of Revenge*, Bacon

presented that revengeful persons often live miserable lives in the following lines "... vindictive persons live the life of witches, who, as they are mischievous, so end they unfortunate" (*Of Revenge*. 81). The life of Hamlet ended in tragedy. He was killed by Laertes. His desire for revenge upon the King became a compulsive force. So he lost his lady-love. He made himself a mad person in order to find out the murderer. He lost his peace of mind because of his evil task.

In the third soliloquy (Act II, Scene ii, Lines 543-601), Hamlet was scolding himself for his continuous failure in executing his task of taking revenge. He spoke in halting voice on account of that grief. He felt himself a useless fellow who lost his self-confidence. Shakespeare keenly observed the psychological trauma of a person who is depressed in life. It is described by the following lines,

A dull and muddy - metted rascal, peak
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,

...

A dam'd defeat was made. Am I a coward? (Act II,
Scene ii, 562-566)

The fourth soliloquy (Act III, Scene I, Lines 56-90) is highly philosophical. Hamlet found himself on the horns of a dilemma: "To be or not to be - that is the question" (Line 56). He asked himself which is nobler whether silently to suffer the cruelties of fate or to put up a fight against the misfortunes of life. It would be better perhaps to commit suicide. The persons who are psychologically affected will face the dilemma of attempting suicide. This soliloquy showed Hamlet's generalizing habit of thought. This revealed the speculative temperament of Hamlet, his irresolute and wavering mind and his incapacity. He was unable to execute his plan of murdering, because the innate nature of Hamlet was God-fearing and just. That's why he waited patiently to make it clear whether his uncle was the murderer or not. After confirming, he avoided to

murder him when he was praying as if he did not want his soul to reach heaven. These are the evidences that Hamlet was in confrontation between justice and injustice which pushed him towards psychologically affected person.

Hamlet's fifth soliloquy (Act III, Scene ii, Lines 379-390) reflects the good nature of Hamlet. Even though he was angry with his mother, he did not lose his nature. He did not wish to commit any unnatural deed such as doing violence to his mother as Nero, the ancient emperor did to his own mother. As it is written in the *Holy Bible*, "Do not sin even in anger", the following lines shows the real nature of Hamlet, "Let me be cruel, not unnatural./I will speak daggers to her, but use none" (Act III, Scene ii, Lines 383-385). Though Hamlet scolded his mother in very harsh terms for her having married a man who was a murderer of her first husband. He almost became coarse and brutal in his language when he condemned his mother. But this is in accordance with his decision to "speak daggers" to her.

In the next soliloquy (Act III, Scene iii, Lines 73-96), he thought of killing the King Claudius but he left alive because the murdered was at prayers. He had the conscious that if he killed in the act of prayer, he would go straight to heaven, which must not be allowed to happen. So he waited patiently for an opportunity when he would be in 'drunk sleep'.

In the last soliloquy (Act IV, Scene iv, Lines 32-66), he utters philosophical thoughts on mankind. He felt himself guilty and asked question whether the life of a man is merely to eat and to sleep. He wanted to fulfill his task of taking revenge. "... What is a man/If his chief good and market of his time/Be but to sleep and feed?" (Act IV, Scene iv, Lines 32-66). He examined himself that he was better than beast. God created mankind and endowed them with very wide-ranging powers of reasoning and He gave us

that capacity to examine the past and the future. He did not want to think about the consequences after murdering. Immediately he wanted to urge his mind to take action. Through soliloquies in the play *Hamlet* Shakespeare wanted to reveal the fact that if the mind is filled with worries or 'idols of mind' as Bacon mentions in his essays, the man will lose his peace of mind. He will be affected psychologically but becomes highly philosophical too at the time of crisis. In taking revenge, since Hamlet is forced to do by the ghost, he finds it difficult to execute. Hamlet's difficulty is internal, something that is a part of his own mental make-up.

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