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Stature Of Shakespeare's Tragic Hero: Hamlet

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Abstract: *Hamlet is the man of many virtues and he reveals only certain virtues to certain people. Hamlet draws his audience, the reader into the different virtues that he has. His qualities are shown through his conversations with other characters as well as through his soliloquies. These words of wisdom and eloquence help to distinguish how Hamlet feels about each other character that he encounters. The phrases and speeches that Hamlet addresses are both poetic and piercing. So when Hamlet is speaking, he is constantly revealing his qualities, which range from love, to respect as well as to hate. Hamlet's most powerful qualities seem to be revealed through his conversation with the people that he cares about-namely his family and friends.*

Key Words: Hamlet, virtues, audience, qualities, conversations, characters, soliloquies, eloquence.

The queen, Gertrude, is Hamlet's mother and she is probably the living being that he cares about the most. Unfortunately, one of Hamlet's virtues, which is revealed in conversation with his mother is a negative one and that is anger. His quality of refined and righteous anger is displayed through the soliloquy stated by him in Act I Scene ii. Hamlet is angry with his mother for having a new husband, through her marriage with his uncle, Claudius, so quickly after his father's death. This anger shines through the words:

"That it should come to this! But two months dead! Nay, not so much, not two So excellent a king that was to this Hyperion to a satyr Frailty thy name is woman! A little month or ere those shoes were old With which she followed my poor father's body Like Niobe, all tears-why she, even she- O God! A beast that wants discourse of reason Would have mourn'd longer-married with my uncle, My father's brother; but no more like my father..." At the end of his soliloquy, Hamlet switches virtues from one of anger to one of fear. This is evident when Hamlet states: "O, most wicked speed to post With such dexterity to incestuous sheets! It is not nor it cannot come to good But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue." Hamlet expresses his fear for his mother's hasty marriage. Hamlet realizes that his mother marrying his uncle can have no good result. Thus, underneath his anger and fear is the current of anxiety for his mother. Respect is another quality that Hamlet displays in conversation with his mother. This occurs when his mother asks him to remain at home rather than return to school in the Act I Scene ii, which he agrees to do: "I shall in all my best obey you madam." This shows that although he disagrees with his mother and her marriage, after such little mourning for her husband, Hamlet Sr.'s death, he still respects his mother and will do what she asks.

Reverence and respect is engrained in his character. It is not reserved for his mother or late father only. He shows regard to others as well. Later in the same act, Hamlet encounters another character, Horatio. Horatio is his good friend, as stated in Act I Scene ii, and the first quality, which Hamlet reveals, is his respect for Horatio: "I know you are no truant."

This shows that Hamlet knows that Horatio is well educated, for which he gives him due respect. This is respect for Horatio's intelligence and decision-making. Hamlet reveals trust as a quality within his character towards Horatio. This occurs at two places; first, when he believes Horatio who says that he has seen Hamlet's father in the form of a ghost:

"A figure like your father, Armed at point exactly, cap-a-pe, Appears before them, and with solemn march Goes slow and stately by them." If Horatio were not a good friend, Hamlet might be angered because he might think that Horatio was mocking him in his mourning. Since Horatio is a good friend, Hamlet seeks all the information about

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his ghost story. In faith of Horatio's honesty, the second occurrence of trust takes place at the end of Act I Scene v. After speaking with his father's ghost, Hamlet meets Horatio again and asks him to swear in the name of secrecy, as well as to be aware of his plan of revenge: "Here as before, never, so help you mercy, How strange or odd some'er I bear myself- As I perchance hereafter shall think meet To put an antic disposition on- That you, at such times, seeing me, never shall, With arms encumber'd thus, or this, head-shake, Or pronouncing of some doubtful phrase, As 'Well, well, we know', or 'We could, an if we would.' Or, 'If we list to speak', or 'There be, an if they might.'

Or such ambiguous giving out, to note That you know aught of me-this do swear." This shows that Hamlet has trust in Horatio that he need not worry about the news of his father's ghostly visit in Denmark. A third, less significant quality that Hamlet reveals when he is with Horatio is sarcasm, which occurs in Act I Scene ii when he questions Horatio's real reason for visiting his home. When Horatio says that he has come for the funeral of Hamlet sr., Hamlet figures that he might really have come to see the wedding of his mother and his uncle: "I pray thee, do not mock me, fellow-student; I think it was to see my mother's wedding." On Horatio's reply that the ceremony of marriage followed too randomly to be avoided by him, Hamlet's severity is revealed: "Thrift, thrift, Horatio! The funeral baked-meatsDid coldly furnish forth the marriage tables. Would I had met my dearest foe in heaven Or ever I had seen that day, Horatio!" So Hamlet slashes out a sarcastic comment, only to be denied by his good and understanding friend, Horatio. Possibly, her quickly put together marriage, so soon after the death of his father, has established a bad seed of sarcasm, which could be a quality, to which Hamlet cannot be blamed for at this time.

But above all, loyalty, love and respect are the three main virtues, which Hamlet reveals, to his father's ghost. Respect is shown when Hamlet decides to follow his father's ghost even with the pressure of his friends not to follow:

"Unhand me. Gentlemen By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me." Even though his father is dead, Hamlet still respects him...dead or alive. If his father's ghost has come back to talk to him, Hamlet is going to respect his wishes. Love, which occurs through out Act I Scene v is simply the willingness of Hamlet to listen to what his father's ghost has to say, rather than letting the words that the ghost of his father spoke, go in one ear and out the other, Hamlet listens carefully and will do anything for him such as the revenge Hamlet sought through out the play. This shows unalloyed love towards his father because he will do anything to honour his father.

Third, Hamlet reveals probably the best quality of the whole play as for which is loyalty. This loyalty is towards, of course, his deceased father, and it occurs in the vow to seek revenge on his uncle, the murderer of his beloved father: "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 in the book and volume of my brain, Unmix'd with baser matter."

Hamlet's father wants revenge on his brother and since he cannot do himself he has asked his son, Hamlet, to do it for him. Hamlet agrees to this request and in doing so, he has showed his loyalty to his hero.... his father. Hamlet's virtues of love and loyalty have shown that the barriers between the living and the dead indeed be broken with a little spiritual help.

It is said that action speaks louder than words but in Hamlet's case, words speak louder than action, for it is the words of Hamlet that reflect the virtues bestowed on him. It has been shown that Hamlet has displayed different virtues with different characters. There seems to be one for whom they appear to be common virtue, which was revealed with each character encounterment respect. Hamlet seems to respect his family and friends through the thick and thin of things because he knows them for who they are. He also knows that mistakes can be made. Most importantly, Hamlet feels it necessary to respect the people he is close to in following the choice question of "To Be or Not To Be" Without character virtues to boost Hamlet's character, Hamlet would drown in a sea of Shakespeare's many characters and would eventually become 'Not to be'. Words and phrases make virtues



and virtues are what make great character.

Hamlet is patient, sympathetic and tolerant. He avoids the rashness of a man of the street, and sets an example for those who have been deceived likewise, how Hamlet behaves like a genuine noble hero and displays his endurance and sublimity to be tested on the bases of the internal and external conflicts he is involved in. As regards his internal conflict it is to be examined whether he is basically sick or he is made sick or he is not sick.

An analysis of Hamlet's character makes it manifest that there is no inherent morbidity in him and he is not basically sick; for, before the appearance of the ghost and his mother's marriage, he has been found to be a jovial fellow, very friendly, loving, affectionate and fond of the theatre. The players on meeting Hamlet recall his former state, the picture of a man of pleasing nature. Bradley accepts the fact that Hamlet formerly represented 'a vision of the prophetic soul' and showed himself a man of scholarship.

Hamlet does not fail and he shows his extra ordinary endurance in dealing with his problems one by one. First of all, he handles the problem of his mother's cleansing because what concerns him most his mother's hasty marriage with the murderer of his father as he cries: "O God! A beast, that wants discourse of reason, Would have mourn'd longer-married with my uncle, My father's brother; but no more like my father Than I to Hercules." Hamlet is quiet conscious of his duty. He knows well that he has to play the role of an avenger by killing Claudius and he feels, too, that he is delaying in carrying out the ghost's command. He often chides himself and questions the ghost: "Do you not come your tardy son to chide, That, lapsed in time and passion, lets go by The important acting of your dread command?" Hamlet is fearless; he can fight against his adversaries to the point of being reckless. He does not fear the presence of the ghost and meets it fearlessly. Further we find that Hamlet does not feel weak even before a murderer like Claudius, because he knows well that if he spares Claudius, he can also kill him. Among the pirates he is not overcome like a morbid philosophical genius. He is daring to the extent of killing the king in the midst of his supporters.

Hamlet's heroic spirit displays his super prudence when Guildenstern tries to force him to speak out his heart, upon which Hamlet reproachingly tells him; "...And there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak. 'Sblood, do you think I am easier to played on then a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, yet you cannot play upon me."

In this manner Hamlet boldly deals with the treachery of his schoolmates. He knows well the worth of heroism and feels that man is nothing if "his chief good and market of his time be but to sleep and feed." He resolves to destroy the party of the present king and applies all his tact to meet his objective. His subtle wisdom helps him in managing a play staged with a view to catching his uncle's conscience. He also cross-examines his mother to cleanse her soul. He tackles Laertes heroically in the duel and kills him. In this manner he keeps on fighting till the end and shows himself full of courage and endurance. In this outer conflict nobody gets the better of Hamlet save Laertes; and even Laertes recognizes his worth when he, on his deathbed, asks Hamlet to forgive him: "Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet. Mine and my father's death come not upon thee, Nor thine on me!" Hamlet presents the picture of a sublime character by overcoming his inner sickness created by his own mother and the world outside. It really requires a heroic heart to overcome one's internal malady. To undertake the cleansing of his mother's soul and to get reconciled with her is a unique task performed by Hamlet. One can easily defeat one's enemies with the help of a sword. But to win over one's heart is a difficult deed. Hamlet's courage in this sense stands unsurpassed where he unlike a common warrior fights his enemies unweponed and gets reconciled with his mother as well as with the world outside him, here he shows the courage of a man in love with humanity. He shows his disgust for his mother whom he loves intensely; consequently he suffers and endures a lot for the sake of concealing his love and proves himself a real hero of the highest order.

He, truly speaking, defies death and damnation. He is the image of a man of real grandeur. He earns a



good deal of our admiration when he does not kill the unprepared king who is at prayer even though some critics attribute this act as his inactivity. He respects the code of soldiership and wins our grace. This feeling of heroism, to a very great extent, lessens the painful effect of the play. Hamlet is absolutely fearless. Physical or material loss has no meaning to him since his objective is to preserve the higher values of life. His whole attention is concentrated on keeping them intact; to great extent he has been triumphant in his efforts winning our admiration and applause.

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