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A Relationship to Death:

An Examination of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

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Abstract: *Hamlet* is an extraordinary play, which is full of deception, drama, intrigue, melancholia and death. This essay will examine Hamlet's relationship to death in selected acts, scenes and soliloquies from the play. The purpose is to investigate how Hamlet's relationship to death changes during the play and why. To ascertain the answer to these enquires, I shall use psychology, particularly, the theory of Dr Michael J Diamond's work and apply it to *Hamlet* in the sections which will be examined. The analysis in the final subsection will elaborate on Hamlet's honour and death. In the end, it will be possible to show that Hamlet's relationship to death is initially a refuge from pain, but that it successively becomes associated with honour.

Keywords: William Shakespeare, Hamlet, death, depression, paternal deprivation, torment, catharsis, uncompleted identification, autonomy issues, honour

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Introduction

William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a fascinating play that has undoubtedly influenced humans for several hundred years. One of the most befuddling subjects in the play is the Danish prince's relationship to death, which is emphasised throughout the work. The play tells the protagonist's story, who loses his father and kingdom. In less than a month, Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, marries her brother-in-law, who now has become the king of Denmark. Dismayed, Hamlet is forced to endure the immorality in Denmark, which successively makes him regard death as a refuge because he is depressed. When the apparition of Hamlet senior reveals himself to his son, Hamlet discovers that Claudius (his uncle) has murdered the late king. Thus, Hamlet is now forced to take revenge. During the play, Hamlet is deceived by many; however, he is never able to avenge his father until the end where he and most of the characters die. The play ends when Fortinbras gives Hamlet a military funeral and salute.

When reading the play for the first time, I became fascinated with Hamlet's obsession with death, which is why I have examined this particular topic in this essay. My thesis is as follows: my main claim is that Hamlet's relationship to death changes throughout the play, from a wish to escape into oblivion to an insight into an honourable end to life. First, I believe that Hamlet's relation to death is initially a refuge from pain. It is evident that Hamlet regards death as a refuge from all mortal pain in act 1.2-3.2. Successively, the prince's relation to death becomes entwined with honour and he becomes willing to die for it. This happens when Hamlet encounters Fortinbras in act 4.4. In subsection 2.2 'Catharsis', I will show that Hamlet's depression decreases; he regains his intellect to a certain extent and his thinking becomes clearer. In the final act and scene of the play, I believe that Hamlet willingly chooses to die for honour, which is the final phase of my thesis.

Before I continue with the rest of this introduction, I shall present what other scholars have written on Hamlet. I have not found any specific essays that examine Hamlet's relationship to death in the same way that I intend to do. This is the reason as to why the essays I present here are only indirectly connected with my thesis.

In *Shakespearean Tragedy*, Andrew Cecil Bradley claims that the death of Hamlet senior made young Hamlet depressed; nevertheless, Gertrude's moral turpitude is the true cause of her son's depression. Gertrude's degeneracy allows Hamlet's depression to consume him. Furthermore, Bradley speaks about Hamlet's apathy; since the prince succumbs to his mental disease, his apathy increases. Bradley believes that Hamlet's melancholia is fuelled by his lethargy, explaining that "the longing for death might become an irresistible impulse to

self-destruction; the disorder of feeling and will might extend to sense and intellect.” (122). Death is, therefore, inevitable in Hamlet’s situation.

In addition to Bradley’s theory, Joseph Carroll, in “Intentional Meaning in Hamlet: An Evolutionary perspective”, believes that Hamlet is suffering from depression. Carroll agrees with Bradley, but he develops Bradley’s theory much more profoundly, explaining Hamlet’s depression in accordance with evolutionary psychology and medicine. Applying modern personality research, Carroll constructs a potential personality for the prince. The scholar also believes that the betrayals and incestuous relationship of Gertrude and Claudius created a depressive ambience in Denmark.

Moreover, Gertrude Morin, in “Depression and Negative Thinking: A Cognitive Approach to Hamlet”, examines Hamlet using cognitive-behavioural theory (CBT). Her essay focuses on analysing Hamlet’s thoughts using CBT to demonstrate how gravely ill and depressed he is. Morin believes that everyone acts differently during calamities. Mental depression affects each victim in various ways; additionally, those who succumb to mental disorientations frequently express anxiety regarding the future, life and civilisation in general. This is well proven in her analysis. Morin analyses Hamlet’s thoughts and actions in certain parts of the play to prove he is completely lost in his thoughts, which are negative.

Finally, I have chosen to add Dr Thomas Regnier’s essay “The Law in Hamlet: Death, Property and the Pursuit of Justice” because it clarifies why the prince becomes so affected by the notion of honour. In the essay, Regnier analyses the law in Denmark, explaining that act 5.1 is important. When conversing with the grave-digger and Horatio in the cemetery, Hamlet notices that the grave-digger is hitting the skull of a corpse. Dismayed, the prince begins to associate that corpse with a lawyer. Regnier believes that this scene is important because Hamlet realises that Claudius has deprived him of everything. Hamlet has no land and his grave will be the only kingdom he will have.

This essay analyses Hamlet’s relation to death predominantly by using psychology. Certain concepts or theories from psychoanalysis, modern psychology and CBT have been applied to examine Hamlet and death. I have used Sigmund Freud’s ‘death-instinct’ and his conception of catharsis. Also, a general principle from CBT has been applied to this essay to examine Hamlet’s cognition in subsection 2.2. Finally, I have referred to general observations from modern psychology concerning depression. The information comes from a website (www.psychcentral.com) created by professional psychologists.

Identification is when individuals mimic the actions of a parental figure. Such a process is pivotal because it will develop the infant’s personality (Laplanche and Pontalis 170). The

identification theory I have predominantly referred to is paternal identification. The psychoanalyst Michael J Diamond believes that a father is important when a child's personality is formed. Fathers can nurture a guiding and survival instinct in their children's development. The father, whom an infant will identify with in accordance with culture, imagery and familial bonds, will influence the personality of his child from infancy to adulthood (Diamond 252). When a man protects or watches over his wife and child, he will create enough time to establish a mother and child relationship. This relationship forms the infant's ego. Therefore, the father is associated with protection in a child's life (Diamond 257).

The father is important to establish a protective environment; nonetheless, if the child is deprived of a father imago, he will suffer from a severe implication: unsuccessful development. The child will have no-one whom he can identify with (Diamond 253). According to Diamond, children must identify with their fathers in order to establish autonomy. During infancy, this process is highly important, but a father will continue to influence his child (even if the child is 55 years old), because he is the figure whom his child will internalise with, regardless of age (Diamond 252, 255-256, 267). Consequently, the father is important to avoid a sense of impotence.

Diamond's theory is slightly problematic due to a reason. It is relatively difficult to conclude that Hamlet is suffering from the repercussions associated with paternal identification because he is a fictional character. However, the theory can offer a conceivable explanation as to why the protagonist is depressed. As Diamond states, "the absence of good enough fathering produces unmistakable consequences at each developmental junction" (253). The problems can only start if the father has either failed as a parent or abruptly died. It seems plausible that Hamlet's autonomy issues began because his father was taken away from him (he was highly passive in the first acts). In other words, the identification process was interrupted.

Moreover, another method that I have used is interpretation. I have analysed soliloquies, quotes and passages from different sections in the play and tried to interpret them. To make sure that they are properly analysed, I have used the work of Amanda Mabillard from Shakespeare Online when needed. Shakespeare Online is a website with information and essays written by Shakespeare scholars, and Mabillard is a Shakespeare scholar who has written about the soliloquies and quotes in *Hamlet*.

I have also analysed and used a few concepts from the essays of the scholars listed in this introduction in two different ways. The purpose is to either use their theories as

verification of my own ones or partially to develop their theories and try to create my own ones from the thoughts of Carroll, Bradley, Morin or Regnier when I can.

Finally, the last subsection elaborates on Hamlet and his view of honour. Regnier's essay has been helpful when writing the final subsection because it indirectly explains how Hamlet understands that his pride is wounded. Additionally, I have referred to Bradley's thoughts about Hamlet's honour to analyse the prince's view of it in the final subsection.

Before beginning the analysis, I will briefly summarise the contents of each section to explain what will be conveyed and analysed. Section 1 attempts to explain what Hamlet's depression is; this section explains how it begins and why it entraps him. It also elaborates on the protagonist's relationship to death; subsection 2.1 shows how it changes. Hamlet is beginning to accept death if it is the only way to maintain honour. Additionally, the prince identifies with Fortinbras, which will increase his autonomy to a certain extent. Subsection 2.2 shows how Hamlet partly regains his autonomy and intellect because he manages to confront the trauma which initiated his depression. In subsection 2.3, I will show how Hamlet willingly walks to his death to expose Claudius' treachery and maintain his honour.

1. A Reason to Seek Death

This section focuses on Hamlet's depression, autonomy issues and the consequential relation to death. My essay is about Hamlet and death, but it is logical to see a connexion between depression and death because Hamlet initially regards it as a refuge. However, it is implausible to claim such an assertion about someone if that person is not depressed, which is why I intend to deviate from my main argument in the first part of this section. Hamlet's father has undoubtedly initiated his son's depression; there will be a brief examination about how his death (and the general depressive ambience in Denmark) made Hamlet regard death as a refuge. I shall analyse a few passages from the play to examine how Hamlet's depression makes him experience the events in Denmark as highly tormenting. Diamond's theory will also be used to explain why death becomes a refuge from emotional torment.

According to Professor Carroll, Denmark's ambience is detrimental to Hamlet because it is full of murder and incestuous betrayal (Carroll). This is true. Let us further examine the death of the late sovereign. It forms the asphyxiating ambience of Denmark in one important way. Act 1.1 begins with officers and soldiers guarding a dark outpost. The main characters in this scene are Horatio (Hamlet's dearest friend), Marcellus (officer) and Bernardo (officer). During a conversation with a soldier, Marcellus greets him goodnight by referring to Claudius

“And liegemen to the Dane” (1.1.15). Only Horatio, Bernardo and Marcellus talk about the late Hamlet senior (1.1.80-107). They are talking about the ghost of the king, but it is one of the few occasions where any characters (except for Hamlet) talk about Hamlet senior. The late sovereign has recently died; it appears that many in the Danish court have resumed life as usual. Claudius’ speech in the opening scene in act 1.2 can verify this observation. The current king states that one should remember his brother with “wisest sorrow”, but it is time that everyone thinks about themselves (1.2.6-7). The late king’s memory is more or less eradicated from Denmark; this could have affected Hamlet negatively because he loves his father, who now is more or less forgotten.

Hamlet senior’s death initiated one thing in young Hamlet’s life: depression. In accordance with this fact, one can assume that Hamlet’s depression is mostly caused by his father’s death, which can be verified if one remembers that the prince loves his father. Hamlet’s love is manifested throughout the play, for example, “So excellent a king, that was to this / Hyperion [...]” (1.2.139-40). The late sovereign, his memory, still lives within young Hamlet.

However, can one be certain that the late sovereign’s death has initiated Hamlet’s depression? What if the prince is not depressed? According to psychologist John M Grohol, depression is characterised by fatigue, concentration- problems, negativity, anxiety, guilt, suicide and mortification (Grohol). Additionally, the depressed victim cannot conduct any general activities. When examining Hamlet’s actions, one can find that these symptoms are displayed by him throughout the play. For example, Hamlet feels guilt, anxiety and negativity because he has not avenged his father (1.2-4.4). The prince consistently derogates himself (for example, soliloquy 2.2 and 4.4), and his death-wish is persistent during most of the play (for example act 3.1). All of these symptoms appear to have started when the late sovereign died. For example, Claudius imparts, “How is it that the clouds still hang on you?” (1.2.66). Furthermore, Gertrude adds that “all that lives must die” (1.2.72) and “Why seems it so particular with thee?” (1.2.75). It is possible to conclude that Hamlet senior’s death has started his son’s depression. Consequently, claiming that Hamlet is not depressed or that his father’s death has not initiated his depression is implausible in this context.

It is conceivable to relate back to Diamond’s theory about identification and autonomy issues, which derive from an incomplete paternal identification. Hamlet’s father has recently died. Although Hamlet is an adult, he is a victim of developmental distortion. Again, Diamond claims that all individuals need their fathers to properly develop; this principle also pertains to adults (266). It becomes evident that Hamlet is a victim of developmental

distortion when he first enters the play. Rather than being angry with his uncle about the throne, or actively judging his mother for her immorality, Hamlet is contemplating suicide: “Or that the Everlasting had not fix’d / His canon ’gainst [self-]slaughter!” (1.2.131-132). Hamlet is doing nothing. Moreover, when conversing with Horatio about the late sovereign, the prince utters “A was a man [...] / I Shall not look upon his like again.” (1.2.187-188). This quote is an unconscious confession that Hamlet needs his father to guide him and to love him. Because his identification with his father is interrupted, Hamlet is not capable of acting independently (incomplete autonomy). He cannot properly rationalise. Again, it is slightly problematic to substantiate that Hamlet is suffering from autonomy and identification problems because he is a fictional character. A psychologist cannot examine someone who does not exist; nevertheless, the interpretation is plausible in accordance with the evidence above.

Professor Bradley states that Hamlet’s fundamental problem is his mother’s immorality. It is tormenting him more than anything else. Gertrude’s depravity is the cause of her son’s depression (Bradley 118). Professor Carroll shares his conviction, stating “a mother making a hasty and degrading remarriage [represents] [the corruption] in the emotional nucleus formed by the relation between mother and child” (Carroll). He helpfully stresses this problem much more than Bradley. However, their observations can be approached in another way, which perhaps might explain why Hamlet’s depression permanently entraps him. Let us examine Hamlet’s parental relationship with his mother; it influences him negatively in one way. In act 1.2, Hamlet is discontented with his mother, including her in his metaphor of degeneracy, “things rank and gross in nature” (1.2.136). The prince continues:

So excellent a king, that was to this
Hyperion to a saty, so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,
Must I remember? Why, she should hang on him
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on, and yet, within a month –
Let me not think on’t! (1.2.139-146).

It is clear that Gertrude’s lack of conscience concerning her late husband is tormenting Hamlet. According to Grohol, a difficult relationship will exacerbate the depressed victim’s mental state (Grohol). Since there is cause to believe that Hamlet senior’s death has initiated young Hamlet’s depression, the aforementioned fact indicates that Gertrude’s improbity has exacerbated her son’s depression.

The evidence that is presented above enables one to conclude that the prince is depressed. It is now relevant to ask why Hamlet's depression has made him regard death as a refuge. To ascertain the answers to this inquiry, I shall attempt to analyse a few passages from the play where his mental problems are more or less evident.

When Hamlet first appears in act 1.2, he imparts a soliloquy:

O that this too too sallied flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst [self-] slaughter! O God, God,
How [weary], stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't, ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden
That grows to seed, thingsrank and gross in nature (1.2. 129-136).

The soliloquy is highly relevant because of two reasons. First, the initial two lines above show that Hamlet is highly depressed. Second, they indicate that the general turpitude of Denmark is another reason as to why Hamlet would rather die than live. One can conclude that the protagonist is contradicting the events in Denmark due to their immoral nature. There is nothing alluring about this life.

Furthermore, the meaninglessness of the world is plaguing Hamlet as the soliloquy indicates. Hamlet is, essentially, asking himself whether life is worth anything if it will bring nothing but pain. Hence, because such calamities cannot be found in death, it becomes a refuge for the depressed prince.

There is evidence in the play that Hamlet is surrendering to his death instinct. According to the psychologist George Boeree, humanity is prone to suffering. It is, in certain cases, normal to seek refuge in death to relinquish all the dismay one can have. He defines this as the death instinct from Freudian theory (Boeree 7). Due to his father's death, Hamlet is dispirited. The events in Denmark promote nothing but despair. Forced to endure this problem, Hamlet wishes to "resolve [himself] into a dew!" (1.2.130). Death becomes a refuge from all mortal burdens as manifested in soliloquy 1.2.

Moreover, Hamlet wishes to dissolve his consciousness in soliloquy 1.2 (Morin 5); his uncle and mother are burdening him. This essentially indicates that Hamlet wants to forget and to be free of torment. This is logical because depression makes a depressed victim very unhappy. Because peace cannot be found in Denmark, the prince's only refuge becomes death.

In act 2.2, Hamlet becomes very disappointed when he encounters actors who are staying in the castle because they subconsciously remind him that he can do very little. After conversing with them, Hamlet imparts another soliloquy, convincing himself that if the actors would have a motivation as great as his (his murdered father; his revenge), they would have

performed more energetically (2.2.540-546). The fundamental meaning is that the actors would have expressed their feelings. Hamlet, however, can do nothing. The more one reads the more one can discern that the protagonist is angry with himself because he has not taken revenge:

Am I a coward?
Who calls me a villain, break my pate across,
Tweaks me by the nose, gives me the lie i'th' throat
As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?
Hah, `swounds, I should take it; for it cannot be
But I am pigeon-liver'd, and lack gall
To make oppression bitter, or ere this
Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear [father] murdered (2.2.551-552, 554-558, 562-563).

According to Bradley, Hamlet cannot avenge his father due to apathy, which results from melancholia : “[the melancholy] accounts for [...] Hamlet’s inaction” (122). One can develop another notion from Bradley’s suggestion. For instance, it is possible to claim that the prince is avoiding reality. To verify this, one must examine the play which Hamlet arranges in act 3.2.

In act 3.2, Hamlet’s theatre begins. His original purpose is to ascertain whether Claudius is guilty of regicide or not; nonetheless, Hamlet’s theatre and investigation of Claudius’s potential treason is a way for him to avoid reality. When the theatre is over, Claudius collapses; this makes Hamlet gleeful: “Why, let the strooken deer go weep” (3.2.256). The melancholic prince’s mission is to take revenge; however, he always fails, which demoralises him. After the dramatic performance, Hamlet is briefly satisfied because, contrary to other times earlier in the play, he succeeds in tormenting Claudius.

As established, the death of Hamlet senior has most likely interrupted young Hamlet’s identification process, which is why it is possible to see a connexion between Diamond’s theory and Hamlet’s situation. As Diamond elucidates above, the absence of a father will lead to terrible repercussions because the son will suffer from identification issues, which will lead to autonomy problems. The victim will become stagnated and incapable of making any decisions when needed (Diamond 252, 255-256, 267). The purpose with ‘the mousetrap’ is to catch the conscience of the king, and ascertain whether or not he is guilty, but the theatrical performance indirectly serves as an avoidance of the terrible reality Hamlet is faced with. He has to take revenge, but he cannot; he avoids the problem by preoccupying himself with other tasks.

The previous passage describes ‘the mousetrap’ from another angle. The motive Hamlet gives in his soliloquy differs from the explanation above; nonetheless, there is a reason as to

why the previous interpretation of 'the mousetrap' is plausible. After discovering that Claudius is probably guilty, Hamlet does not show any indications of wanting to kill his uncle. Instead, the prince was only gleeful because he managed to negatively affect Claudius. Instead of admiring his qualities as an actor, Hamlet should have been angry, planning how to kill his uncle within the nearest hours. This was not his reaction. Hamlet was simply happy that he managed to do something in oppose to soliloquy 2.2 where he hated himself because of his stagnancy. It is, therefore, reasonable that Hamlet is avoiding reality (that he cannot avenge nor act against the immorality in Denmark) by preoccupying himself with other tasks.

It is possible to analyse Hamlet's relationship to death by examining soliloquy 3.1 and relating it to the previous argument. The following is conveyed by the prince:

To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing, end them. To die, to sleep –
No more, and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to; 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep –(3.1.55-63).

Due to psychological impotence, Hamlet hates himself. Soliloquy 2.2 is, therefore, connected with soliloquy 3.1. 'The mousetrap' is conceived in 2.2, which signifies that Hamlet resents himself because he knows that he cannot act. This is the reason as to why he avoids reality in act 3.2. The prince can neither serve his purpose (revenge) nor act against the general degeneracy; rather than acknowledging this detail, Hamlet flees. Since the protagonist knows that his vengeance is yet unfulfilled, soliloquy 3.1 is a cry of pain. Lamenting his previous and persistent passivity, Hamlet debates whether death is not preferable to failure. Consequently, Hamlet regards death as a refuge in these passages.

Finally, the preceding passages manifest that Hamlet is tormented by the events, his uncompleted task, his depression and autonomy issues. Hamlet's mental problems make him want to: "resolve [himself] into a dew!" (1.2.130); dissolve his consciousness; flee from his emotional pain; avoid reality and do nothing even when he realises that Claudius committed regicide ('the mousetrap'). Hence, death is a refuge from the emotional torments Hamlet has within him because it is the only place where all his calamities cannot be found in.

2. Honour and Death

2.1. A Different Hamlet

This section will elucidate Hamlet's change. So far, the prince's depression has made him perceive every event in Denmark as unbearable, causing him to regard death as a refuge. Nevertheless, when meeting Prince Fortinbras, Hamlet changes. He becomes preoccupied with the notion of honour. The explanation partially lies in Hamlet's incomplete paternal identification, which will alter when encountering the Norwegian prince. Predominantly focusing on soliloquy 4.4, my purpose with this subsection is to explain why Hamlet undergoes alteration. This is important to clarify because it will affect his relationship to death, verifying the second part of my thesis. Hamlet still wishes for death but not to seek refuge from pain. Influenced by Fortinbras' courage as well as his sense of duty, Hamlet feels mortified. He has neither sought revenge nor acted against the general turpitude in Denmark. Hamlet is now ready to resolve all the predicaments. His honour is at stake and he must defend it, cost what it may, and even his own life: "while to my shame I see / The imminent death of twenty thousand men, / That for a fantasy [...] / Go to their graves [...] / How stand I then, / That have a father kill'd (4.4.59-62, 56-57).

According to Amanda Mabillard, it is possible to argue that Hamlet's attitude has changed in soliloquy 4.4 in one way. The protagonist can now find it reasonable to seek revenge because it is a question of honour. Encountering Fortinbras and his army, Hamlet learns that the Norwegians are embarking on a military expedition. Prince Fortinbras desires to conquer land. Hamlet perceives him as highly courageous; additionally, he regards himself as narrow-minded and pathetic. Comparing himself with Fortinbras' magnitude, chivalry and honour, Hamlet distorts reality because he perceives Fortinbras as someone greater than he might be. The prince exhorts himself that he must avenge his father by distorting reality because it is a question of honour (Mabillard).

Let us elaborate further on Mabillard's observation above. She indirectly illuminates an important character in her observation: Fortinbras. Fortinbras is the one who initiates Hamlet's new attitude. The Norwegian prince is a royalty and a warrior who is, according to Hamlet, embarking on a quest for honour. It is known from the play that Hamlet senior was a very courageous warrior who conquered Fortinbras senior's land. As soliloquy 4.4 indicates, young Fortinbras wants to conquer land in Poland. Although the outcomes might be severe, Fortinbras and his men place themselves in danger for honour: "Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot / Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause, / When honor's at the stake" (4.4. 56, 62-63). Furthermore, Hamlet senior was a prideful person as Horatio indicates in his quote "prick'd on by a most emulate pride" (1.1.83). Horatio also sees a similarity between Julius

Caesar and King Hamlet; both were prideful (1.1.83, 114). There is a connexion between Fortinbras and the deceased king.

Fortinbras is pivotal because there are similarities between him and Hamlet senior in this scene. When witnessing Fortinbras in armour, commanding an army, Hamlet is possibly reminded of his father in his uniform when he commanded an army: "Such was the armor he had on / When he the ambitious Norway combated." (1.1.60-61). It is possible that Hamlet perceives his father's qualities in Fortinbras in this particular scene.

Hamlet becomes very active after he encountered Fortinbras because he identifies with him. After meeting the Norwegian prince, Hamlet exchanges his death-warrant, condemning Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to death. Hamlet avoids death when combating pirates and, furthermore, becomes their friend. Finally, the protagonist dispatches a pirate to deliver letters to Horatio and Claudius. It is evident that Hamlet changes; he has autonomy, to a certain extent. It is, therefore, probable that Hamlet might be transposing his father's qualities unto the Norwegian prince, making him the embodiment of the late sovereign, Hamlet. As previously concluded, identification develops the individual's personality (Laplanche and Pontalis 170). Paternal identification is necessary to establish autonomy, even if the child is, for example, 30 years old (Diamond 256). Hamlet is approximately 30 years old (5.1.152). Moreover, Diamond does emphasise that identification is possible with another person than one's biological father (269). Young Hamlet is, in other words, identifying with a substitutional father-figure – Fortinbras – who symbolises Hamlet senior.

Nevertheless, how is this connected with death? Let us examine the following part of soliloquy 4.4:

Examples gross as earth exhort me:
Makes mouths at the invisible event,
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
Even for an egg-shell. Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honor's at the stake. How stand I then,
That have a father kill'd (4.4.46,50-57).

The relationship to death in soliloquy 4.4 is different because it is not a refuge from the previous pathological desire anymore. Death is unavoidable; Hamlet would embrace it but only for honour as implied in the soliloquy. This can only happen if the prince has autonomy; hence, this insight into the dynamics of honour is the reason as to why he subconsciously identifies with Fortinbras. As concluded in the introduction, Hamlet is a fictional character. Claiming that the results in this subsection are flawless is slightly difficult because Hamlet

cannot be examined by a psychologist. However, the conclusions above show that Hamlet could have been suffering from the repercussions associated with paternal deprivation.

Finally, when Hamlet encounters Fortinbras, he realises that he must act to maintain his honour. This is why Fortinbras becomes pivotal; the prince subconsciously identifies with him to establish autonomy, hence, seeking revenge and maintaining honour.

2.2 Catharsis

This subsection will describe what happens to Hamlet when he returns to Denmark from England. His former love, Ophelia, is dead. Witnessing her burial, as well as seeing her brother Laertes' grief, Hamlet re-experiences his trauma associated with the loss of his father. Consequently, this subsection is necessary because it will attempt to prove that Hamlet is not psychologically delusional when choosing to die for honour in the last scene of the play.

Encountering the grieving Laertes at Ophelia's grave triggers a psychological process which leads to Hamlet's catharsis. In act 5.1, Hamlet is in a cemetery with Horatio, his dearest friend. Soon, both of them see that another company is approaching the cemetery with a corpse. Noticing that the deceased is not getting a proper Christian burial, Hamlet immediately comprehends that the victim must have committed suicide. The most pivotal observation so far is that Ophelia has not received a proper Christian burial. After Hamlet understands that Ophelia is the deceased victim, he emerges from his place of concealment. For the first time in the play, the melancholic prince displays one important characteristic: decisiveness. He confronts Claudius, Gertrude and Laertes with these words "This is I, / Hamlet the Dane" (5.1.243-244). Observe the word 'Dane'; it signifies 'the King' (Wofford 139). Subsequently, Hamlet exclaims "For though I am not splenitive [and] rash, / Yet have I in me something dangerous, / Which let thy wisdom fear." (5.1.247-249). Thus, Hamlet appears to be more rational than previously because he, as the quotes in this paragraph indicate, appears to be rationalising. He knows who he is and what he can do.

In addition to the previous facts, it is possible to detect a pattern between Hamlet senior's death and Ophelia's death. Let us return to the mourning Hamlet from act 1.2. When meeting Horatio after he returns to Denmark from Wittenberg, Hamlet laments the fact that his father died without receiving his final Eucharist. This signifies that the late sovereign's Christian burial is incomplete. In soliloquy 1.2, Hamlet expresses his love for his father; he expresses how virtuous Hamlet senior was. He compares him to Hyperion, for example (1.2.139-140). Needless to say, when the late sovereign died, Hamlet must have wept at his

grave, displaying feelings and emotions similar to Laertes' at Ophelia's grave. There is a connexion. When witnessing the burial of Ophelia, and when seeing Laertes mourning and crying at his sister's grave, Hamlet mentally relives his father's burial.

Additionally, according to Amanda Mabillard, Ophelia is the most innocent and naïve person in Denmark because "[she] is the epitome of goodness [...] [Ophelia] is childlike and naïve" (Mabillard). Developing her interesting observation, I believe that another point can be made concerning Ophelia and the late king. Why is she so important to Hamlet?

Fundamentally, the answer is because she loved him. Hamlet was loved by someone who was loving and innocent. The only other person who loved Hamlet and was loving, innocent and deceived (according to Hamlet) was his father. Hamlet perceives his father's love and nature in Ophelia's lifeless body; possibly, he is re-experiencing the pain that came from losing his father.

Hamlet senior's death has initiated his son's depression and autonomy issues. When young Hamlet witnesses Ophelia's funeral, he relives the pain which he undoubtedly experienced during his father's burial. This is important because a significant event can now occur: the re-emergence of Hamlet's suppressed trauma and psychological issues. Ophelia's death represents his trauma. According to Freudian theory, when a victim suffers from a terrible trauma, it is suppressed within the unconscious where the victim can no longer remember it (many are sceptical about Freud's theory; his conception of the conscious and unconscious is also questioned. However, according to George Dvorsky (bioethicist), Freud misunderstood his conception, but his idea is not completely incorrect (Dvorsky)). This protects the depressed victim from unbearable pain. Nonetheless, when the trauma is re-activated, the depressed victim experiences 'catharsis' because the trauma re-emerges; all the negative feelings and despair which are associated with the trauma will be revealed. The depressed victim can finally understand the issue. The final phase is called insight: to process the issue and move on (Boeree 16). Hence, Hamlet can now, theoretically, understand his issue, process it and move on.

Furthermore, Dr Ben Martin states that a depressed victim must begin to understand that all that is perceived during the depressed period is inaccurate. When that occurs, the depressed victim can understand that her reality is irrational, thus, process her problem and successively dispose of it (Martin 1, 4).

It is impossible to claim that Hamlet's catharsis is fully completed because there is no medical recovery that can be so immediate. Nevertheless, his thinking is different as I have

tried to show in this subsection, making it plausible to assume that Hamlet has undergone a catharsis adequate enough to enable him to regain his intellect.

In conclusion, Ophelia's death re-activates Hamlet's trauma. It is revealed and he can now process it. Because the prince's incomplete identification with his father is derived from his trauma, the issue will decrease. The same pertains to the autonomy problems. Hamlet can begin to understand that everything he has perceived during his depression is irrational. He can now rationalise because his rationality should be more coherent than previously.

Verification is "This is I, / Hamlet the Dane" (5.1.243-244); *This is I, / Hamlet King of Denmark*.

2.3 A Chosen Death: In the Name of Honour

Section 2.1 explained that Hamlet's relationship to death developed into a question of honour. However, that development derived from his psychological problems; it was not something the prince willingly chose since he was still mentally unstable. Section 2.2 elucidated that Ophelia's death enabled Hamlet to experience a catharsis because he had relived his trauma. The most germane point with section 2.2 was that it concluded that Hamlet's depression decreased. This conclusion implies that Hamlet's rationality should be more profound than previously. What I argue in this subsection is that Hamlet's relationship to death completely changes. It is no longer associated with his previous psychological issues but with his honour. He has not acted against Claudius; he has not acted against the general improbity in Denmark either. In other words, Hamlet must redeem himself. Again, it is impossible to claim that Hamlet's recovery is complete; however, his thinking is clearer than previously because his understanding of the situation has deepened. He willingly accepts his death, as I show in this subsection, and this acceptance is not associated with his previous pathological issues due to his experienced catharsis. Succinctly, Hamlet masters his death-drive now.

In act 5.2, many events happen. Claudius writes Hamlet's death warrant, conveying to the English king that he wants the prince executed. When his nephew returns, Claudius conspires with Laertes, forming a plot which can kill Hamlet. They arrange a combat in which Claudius wagers that Hamlet will win; nonetheless, Laertes is meant to kill him. To ensure the prince's death, Laertes' rapier is poisoned by both him and the king. Recovering from depression and having gained insight into his absolute mortality, Hamlet accepts the challenge and walks to his potential death. This final subsection will illuminate why Hamlet chooses to die. The purpose is to verify the final part of my thesis: Hamlet willingly dies for honour.

In act 5.2, Hamlet informs Horatio about the death-sentence Claudius wrote. Since Hamlet appears at Ophelia's funeral, one can assume that his uncle realises that he has escaped his death. This signifies that Claudius will try to murder his nephew again because he has openly manifested his hatred against him. Claudius cannot let Hamlet live. Consequently, Hamlet knows that he will be risking death if attempting regicide.

Moreover, a courtier informs the prince that his uncle has arranged a combat, claiming that Hamlet can win. During this conversation, he presumably realises one thing: the combat is a trap. This is exemplified by his quotes during the conversation with the courtier "Let the foils be / brought, the gentlemen willing, and the King hold his purpose, / I will win for him and I can; if not, I will gain nothing / but my shame and the odd hits." (5.2.162-165). According to the online *OED* and *Macmillan Dictionary*, foil signifies 'thin sword', but it can signify 'defeat' (*OED*; *Macmillan Dictionary*). In other words, Hamlet subconsciously understands that the king presumably plans to murder him. According to Lilian Winstanley, the quote "Thou / wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart [...]" (5.2.194-195) manifests that Hamlet instinctively knows that his adversaries are planning his death (Winstanley). Claudius' sudden admiration is implausible. It is, therefore, conceivable to assume that Hamlet comprehends the danger when accepting the challenge. And yet he does not flee. In contrast to soliloquy 1.2 and 3.1, Hamlet completely embraces the thought of death, and there is a plausible explanation for this.

Before witnessing Ophelia's funeral, Hamlet is in a cemetery. Conversing with Horatio and a gravedigger, he becomes distressed (act 5.1), demonstrated in the following:

Why may not that be the skull of a
lawyer? Where be his quiddities now, his quillities, his
cases, his tenures, and his tricks? Why does he suffer this
mad knave now to knock him about the sconce with a
dirty shovel, and will not tell him of his action of battery?
Hum! This fellow might be in's time a great buyer of land,
with his statutes, his recognizances, his fines, his double
vouchers, his recoveries (5.1.92-99).

Four words are relevant in this passage: tenures, sconce, fines and double voucher. The following definitions are found *inter alia* in the online *OED*: tenures, the right to a land; sconce, the head; fines, a permanent disposal of a land, and double voucher, a document which proves one's right to a property (*OED*; Wofford 134). All the preceding words describe Hamlet's current situation, which is best explained by Dr Thomas Regnier, Professor of Law. He claims that Hamlet is in dismay because he realises that his grave might be the only land he will have. Claudius has deprived him of his throne and land: "Hamlet's grave will be the

only land Hamlet ever possesses” (Regnier 125). Hence, the situation symbolises Hamlet’s mortification as a monarch, person and son.

Moreover, the distresses distinguished above are further manifested in the prince’s conversation with Horatio before the battle with Laertes. Hamlet is deprived of his throne and his father is murdered (5.2.64-70). The aforementioned reasons manifest why the prince accepts Claudius’ challenge despite the risk of death – honour.

In accordance with the aforesaid, Hamlet must murder Claudius for his honour. Nonetheless, there is another problem, which Professor Bradley illuminates. If Hamlet kills Claudius, he will be perceived as a coldblooded murderer (Bradley 97). Also, it will not reveal Claudius’ treason, which Hamlet must expose to maintain his honour after murdering his uncle. There is a solution to this problem: Laertes. Hamlet accepts the challenge (and a potential death) because Laertes is the only person who knows that Claudius’ combat is a trap; it cannot be a coincidence that he is the one whom the protagonist will fight. Hamlet knows that Laertes despises him; nevertheless, if he can convert him, Claudius’ treachery can be revealed. Furthermore, Hamlet previously does state that he will try to gain Laertes’ confidence “I’ll [court] his favors” (5.2.78). In other words, the prince can kill Claudius and avenge his father without being perceived as dishonourable. Additionally, Hamlet could save Laertes (he could also die in combat), whom he actually pities as expressed in 5.2.75-78.

Let us return to the combat. It will elucidate one detail: Hamlet’s relationship to death. Hamlet gives a speech where he asks Laertes for his forgiveness. Polonius’ son soon pities the prince, stating “And yet it is almost against my conscience” (5.2.278). This indicates that Hamlet’s speech manages to mitigate Laertes’ hatred. Additionally, it indirectly verifies that Hamlet wants to convert his adversary as concluded above. When mortally wounded, Laertes realises that Claudius is manipulating him and everyone else. Polonius’ son comprehends that the king is taking advantage of his grief to execute his evil deeds, exclaiming “It is a poison temper’d by himself” (5.2.310). Since it was Laertes who provided the poison and not Claudius, the quote indicates that Laertes is referring to the king’s cunning. He understands that the king is the true villain, for Hamlet has not manipulated him; he has asked for forgiveness. Consequently, Laertes reveals Claudius’ treachery (5.2.302), which is that he wants to murder Hamlet, the son of the late sovereign. Hamlet can now seek revenge without becoming as dishonourable as Claudius. Additionally, when murdering, the prince has maintained his honour because he has avenged his father. This is also something Hamlet has wanted to do for his honour (5.2.64). Therefore, Hamlet accepts the combat, death for honour.

On the other hand, how can one assume that Hamlet is prepared to die for honour? It is possible to argue that the protagonist does not want to die for this purpose. Nevertheless, examine the following expressions from Hamlet: “Thou / wouldst not [...] my heart – but / it is no matter. “ (5.2.194-196) and “we defy augury” (5.2.202). Both signify that he does not care about any future implications. Now, let us re-examine soliloquy 4.4 the part where Hamlet compares himself to Fortinbras. Considering him as a chivalrous man who fights for honour regardless of death, Hamlet admires his qualities and subconsciously mimics them. The prince’s preceding expressions denote courage. The admiration of Fortinbras denotes honour; furthermore, Hamlet’s quest for vengeance indicates justice for him and his father. Because Hamlet is displaying these qualities, he is prepared to die for honour. Thus, another notion is relatively implausible in this context.

Hamlet’s final appearance portrays a young prince who sacrifices himself for honour. He redeems himself and avenges his father. Before dying, Hamlet beckons Horatio to convey his story because he is afraid that it might be misapprehended (5.2.321-322,326-331). The prince was not uncourageous but a victim who was depressed and could neither avenge his father nor act against the turpitude in Denmark. When Fortinbras gives Hamlet a military funeral and salute, he verifies that Hamlet is perceived as an honourable man: “For he was likely, had he been put on, / To have prov’d most royal” (5.2.379-380). Thus, Hamlet is prepared to die for his honour; this is his relationship to death in the final act of the play.

Conclusion

This essay has examined Hamlet’s relation to death in three phases. My main claim is that Hamlet’s relationship to death changes throughout the play, from a wish to escape into oblivion to an insight into an honourable end to life. Each section elaborates on themes which successively prove my thesis. The following information is a brief summary of the results found in this essay.

In section 1, the purpose is to ascertain why Hamlet becomes depressed. This is important because it enables one to examine Hamlet’s relationship to death in the subsequent sections. The prince’s depression is initiated by his father’s death; moreover, his paternal identification is interrupted, hence, making him suffer from autonomy issues. These two problems constitute the basis for Hamlet’s depression. Gertrude’s immorality entraps her son in his depression.

Section 1 also examines Hamlet's relation to death in several examples. Due to his psychological impotence, which prevents him from taking revenge and acting against the improbity in Denmark, Hamlet regards death as a refuge. Moreover, the turpitude in Denmark repulsed him, causing him to contemplate death. The death instinct also explains why the protagonist believes that death is the only shelter he has.

Subsection 2.1 examines Hamlet and death from another angle: honour. When meeting Fortinbras, Hamlet realises that he must do anything to maintain his honour, even risk death. Passive due to his incomplete paternal identification, Hamlet subconsciously identifies with Fortinbras. This establishes autonomy in the prince to a certain extent, hence, enabling him to act.

In subsection 2.2, Hamlet witnesses Ophelia's funeral, which initiates his catharsis. The memory of his father's death and all the pain associated with it is re-activated; this is important because the prince can process the problem and successively dispose of it. Additionally, Hamlet's autonomy issues decrease because he can begin to understand that his thinking was irrational during his depressive period. Since Hamlet has experienced a catharsis, he can begin to rationalise much clearer than previously.

Subsection 2.3, which is the final subsection, also elaborates on Hamlet's honour and death, but from another angle. Recovering from his depression, Hamlet understands that he is mortified. He has neither avenged his father nor acted against the injustice in Denmark. To redeem himself, the prince accepts his uncle's unofficial death-trap to reveal his treachery, murder him and redeem himself.

The evidence in this essay shows that my thesis is relatively credible, but there are topics that can offer other credible results and understandings of either Hamlet's depression or relation to death. In this study, I have dealt with Hamlet and his association with death, but another possible explanation as to why Hamlet is so stagnated can perhaps be found in the Oedipus complex. Perhaps his apathy derives from his guilt concerning Claudius' murder as Sigmund Freud suggested in his work *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Leitch et al. 922-923). Nevertheless, this would be another study (another essay), but I merely wish to emphasise that everything is a question of interpretation.

Finally, this essay has examined Hamlet's changing relation to death. At first, Hamlet's relationship to death is initially a refuge from pain. Successively, it becomes entwined with honour, so he becomes willing to die for it. Finally, after he has experienced his catharsis, Hamlet comprehends that he is mortified as a son, monarch and person. He must redeem

himself. Being in a comprehensive state of mind, the prince willingly chooses to die for honour.

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