
Adversity – The Pathway to a Renewed Identity

Adversity often comes as a surprise to us, yet it is something we all will likely experience. During dealing with hardship, our personality develops and evolves to match the new circumstances. In Hamlet, Shakespeare examines the way in which adversity takes us through a range of emotions that result in our becoming more balanced individuals. In the play, we see how young Hamlet changes after his father's death and meeting the Ghost. In particular, Shakespeare displays how Hamlet's identity is shaped: during his mourning phase, as he relies on his closest allies, and when he faces Laertes at the end of the play.

Hamlet faces a torrent of emotions when his father dies. He feels despondent and as though his life is worth nothing. Thus, adversity shapes his identity – bringing out his deepest, darkest qualities. In the beginning of the play Hamlet wishes that his “too sullied flesh would melt”, and this is an indication of his desperation and dissatisfaction with life. Shakespeare shows that adversity first makes us become downhearted and hopeless before we eventually regain our balance. During this phase of Hamlet's life, he essentially loses his identity and sense of purpose. Added to his father's death, the “incestuous” re-marriage of his mother further troubles Hamlet. We may be able to relate to this initial phase of adversity, where there seems to be no solution to our problems. We may become bitter and despondent and face a range of emotions before we can calm down and reach a logical conclusion. Shakespeare highlights this crucial phase, demonstrating the powerful effect such emotions could have on a person.

Shakespeare also explores how, on the path to coping with our emotions, we look to our closest allies for comfort and support. Though his companions are few, Hamlet cherishes his friendship with Horatio, who is a protective friend to him. Horatio serves the role of a trusty confidant to Hamlet, since Hamlet relies on him to confirm his suspicions towards Claudius. Horatio aids Hamlet in taming his wild impulses, and confirming if his feelings are valid. Representing the good in a world of good and evil, Horatio stands beside Hamlet as he experiences mind-altering difficulties. It is noteworthy that Horatio does not try to impose himself on Hamlet, or manipulate him to change his actions. Rather, he uses his close friendship with Hamlet to listen to Hamlet's secrets and support him. Shakespeare therefore shows that as we ourselves face adversity, we turn to our closest associates, who can help us balance our emotions and support us through our difficulty. Because of Horatio's faithfulness, Hamlet “wears” Horatio in his “heart's core” and views him as a source of encouragement.

Hamlet also demonstrates the way adversity can often lead us from sheer confusion to a point where we become more rational and logical. Through hardship can make us experience wild emotions at first, it often leaves us better able to sympathize even with our enemies and view issues. When Hamlet returns from his trip to England, he notices that Laertes is hostile toward him. Yet, when the two men fight at Ophelia's burial, Hamlet withdraws first. Hamlet later says to Laertes: “Give me your pardon, sir...I have done you wrong.” After facing difficulties in his life, Hamlet can act maturely and even sympathize with Laertes. Though he strongly loved Ophelia too, Hamlet realizes that Laertes is in a similar position to him. After all, Laertes has also lost his father – Polonius. Hamlet thus endeavors to treat Laertes with greater respect, it seems he realizes that Laertes faces an exasperating situation. Through the play, Shakespeare explains that adversity can help us be more balanced and rational, even when we are suffering

ourselves. Through adversity, Hamlet becomes more intelligent and cautious, restraining himself from killing Claudius as Claudius prays, to avoid sending him to heaven.

Hamlet shows the major role adversity plays in shaping our personality, taking us through a range of extreme emotions, before we eventually develop into more balanced individuals. Young Hamlet is very despondent when adversity strikes him. When his father dies he faces a range of emotions, from anger to sadness, even losing the will to live. However, Horatio plays a large role in supporting Hamlet, and helping to calm his feelings by being a loyal eyewitness. By the end of the play, Hamlet has developed into a cautious and more balanced individual who is even able to sympathize with Laertes. Through the play, Shakespeare shows that adversity can actually bring out the best in us as we develop a new identity. Though we often run from challenges, there is little we can do to completely prevent adversity from entering our lives. Moreover, these challenges we face can make us more resilient and confident individuals, who are better able to understand the world around them.

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