
Summary: The Dramatic Irony Through The Hamlet Play

Shakespeare is timeless and has become a staple in literature, theatre, and the curriculum. The depth of his characters, the nuances of the plot, and the complexities of the themes cause Shakespeare's original plays to be adapted time and time again. Although certain themes and perspectives from the original play are outdated and unacceptable in modern times, Shakespeare carefully crafted his play to target the people of Elizabethan era. His themes and characters reflect the people of the 1600s and their beliefs. In Hamlet, Shakespeare targets his audience by representing religion and philosophy in his play. Through the addition of these ideas, Shakespeare tailors the content to his audience which emphasizes the dramatic irony of the plot.

In the 1600s, religion played a massive role in society, and Shakespeare reflected this in the famous 'To be or not to be' soliloquy. By maintaining a neutral stance on religion, it appeals to a broader audience and avoids trouble. Shakespeare's audience would have experienced religious reforms and most would have had to have converted from Catholicism to Protestantism or risk being executed. This throws up doubts about the church and religion and the speech may have posed questions about what and who to believe when it comes to the afterlife. To be a Catholic or not to be a Catholic that is the question. "Protestants do not believe in Purgatory, nor do they believe a soul has the capability of returning from the dead. Catholics on the other hand do believe in Purgatory". Hence Hamlet faces a dilemma deciding if the Ghost is truly a "Catholic soul trapped in Purgatory" or if the Ghost is disguised as a "Protestant demon conning him" to commit sins. In the famous soliloquy, Shakespeare does not specify a specific religion which is very smart since religion is a very sensitive matter and may have caused his play to become boycotted. Due to this neutral stance, most Elizabethans would have sympathized with Hamlet's to discover the truth about his father's death and to avenge himself on Claudius when Hamlet becomes convinced that Claudius is indeed the murderer of his father. Shakespeare solidifies his views on the act of murder when Horatio says "Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince, /And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest! Horatio seems to assume that Hamlet is not going to hell but to heaven. Horatio, in other words, does not seem to have any religious qualms about Hamlet's conduct which implicitly implies Shakespeare's own thoughts. Therefore Hamlet targets to the audience through his various religious allusions and his neutral stance between Catholicism and Protestantism during an era of religious turmoil.

Along with religious undertones in the famous speech, Shakespeare poses an interesting rhetorical and philosophical question to the audience. This play was written during the renaissance period, which was an era of enlightenment, art, science, literature and philosophy. Shakespeare infuses many philosophical thoughts and innovative views that was characterized from the Renaissance period. In the second soliloquy, In Hamlet, the prince finds death desirable and something to be devoutly wished to end his suffering. Prince Hamlet constantly contemplates on whether suicide can help release him from the pangs of misery he faces in life. He feels suicide is a valid method to end his suffering which is directly from the result of his moral dilemma of killing his uncle.

However he fears that he will face eternal suffering in hell since Christianity forbids suicide as life is a godly treasure that humans must not misuse. Hamlet struggles with the proposition that

life after death is unknown and could be worse than life. This moral dilemma between facing life or the consequences of death is eloquently described in the speech, "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 take arms against a sea of troubles/And, by opposing, end them? To die, to sleep" . Hamlet deliberates whether or not it is more honourable to live as a human with guilty actions, or to die in good conscience. However he slowly loses his admiration for the latter and then refers to death as rub. A 'rub' means an obstacle on the bowls lawn that averts the bowl, hence the term could be referring to the fear of life which is an impediment that helps Hamlet pause and change his course of thinking. He decides that he must avenge his father's death to re-instill meaning into his life, and Claudius's death signifies the abolition of the injustices that he's incurred. Hamlet is contemplating suicide as much as reflecting on life in this soliloquy. Hamlet philosophically examines this through his soliloquy which induces the audience to form their respective opinions on the issue. Hence Shakespeare included this soliloquy to make the audience about the value of life and repercussions of death which reflects the Renaissance period and targets the audience.

Therefore Shakespeare has very carefully crafted his play to revolve around relevant social, economic, and political standards of the time. Through introducing religion and raising questions on the philosophy of death, Shakespeare caters to his audience in a profound way to make the play more relatable.?