

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 5. Issue.3. 2018 (July-Sept)

ISSN

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE IN REFERENCE TO 'HAMLET' AND
'OTHELLO'

Md. Jashim Uddin¹, Md. Habeeb Faruk Khan²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Languages

IUBAT—International University of Business, Agriculture and Technology

4 Embankment Drive Road, Sector 10

Uttara Model Town, Dhaka 1230, Bangladesh

Email: jashim.uddin@iubat.edu

²Senior Lecturer, Department of Languages

IUBAT—International University of Business Agriculture and Technology

4 Embankment Drive Road, Sector 10

Uttara Model Town, Dhaka 1230, Bangladesh

Email: habeeb_farukkhan@iubat.edu



ABSTRACT

The elucidation of philosophy of life varies from person to person and society to society. To unearth the real facts of social values, customs, norms and rituals, the writers go into the internal world of human heart to show the hidden psychology of the social characters. William Shakespeare's attempts on revealing the viewpoints of the characters of 'Hamlet' and 'Othello' based on contemporary society are very vivid in the context of Elizabethan Age. This paper concentrates on the Shakespearean way of observing life portrayed in the tragedies 'Hamlet' and 'Othello'.

Key Words: Elucidation, philosophy, unearth, hidden psychology, mystery, viewpoints, contemporary, vivid.

Introduction

It will really be surprising if anyone declare they have no idea, not even a single clue about William Shakespeare. This figure is famous not only because of his talents and masterpieces in literature, but for his enigmatic life as well. Only some general facts are known about him and his life, but the certain part of his life is still covered with mystery. A range of ideas usually decides the philosophy of one's life. The belief system humans have is highly influenced by the religion, culture, traditions and family that he is surrounded by. As adults, our thought process gets into shape based on the experiences and accomplishments achieved in lifetime. Throughout the play 'Hamlet', we experience significant changes in the philosophies of Hamlet on life and death, mostly caused by some later incidents in his life. The revelation of Hamlet's wish to disappear from the earth is apparent in his first soliloquy of the play. He is so discouraged by life, and the continual run of negative events that are taking place. Primarily, his father's death has brought him anguish as well as his

mother's marriage with his uncle Claudius is unnatural and a bit unexpected to him which leads him taking the revenge. But as a man of education he comes to the judgments and re-judgments throughout the play. But in 'Othello' we find the combination of most vital human emotions and feelings, hate and love. The story is serious and ironical. We can not judge about any point of view because there is no narrator in the play, the play tells the audience about an honest and noble man who can be influenced so that he is ready to kill the woman he loves. This tragedy is well-known all over the world and there are even set phrases about the main hero and his jealousy.

Discussion of Shakespearean philosophy of life

Tragedy is a tale about love and betrayal. But the characters and themes still differ a lot. Shakespeare pays more attention to human nature and psychology. The important difference lies for example in the motivations that Iago had, in the version of Cithio Iago just wanted to revenge on Desdemona for her refusal, in the Shakespeare's play the situation is more complicated. 'Hamlet' is a play about growing up. At the start of the play Hamlet still believes life should be beautiful and perfect and people should be good and honest. He is shocked and angry when he discovers that many people are neither good nor honest. He thinks life should have deep meaning but he can find no meaning at all.

Throughout the play, he struggles to accept that life is painful and difficult. All the beautiful things he believed are gradually destroyed and he becomes depressed and suicidal. Just before the end of the play he changes, he becomes colder and less emotional. He has no hope but he no longer cares. He accepts life is meaningless. Instead of 'thinking about everything', he acts. He has his old friends murdered. He kills his uncle and Laertes and accepts his own death. Shakespeare's Hamlet is a complex play where many themes are intertwined - themes that are essential to the development of the play. The issue of death and disease, both physical and emotional is very prevalent throughout the duration of the play, as well as fate and divine intervention. The play also questions madness and whether it can be feigned, as well as corruption and its moral implications. Also the 'To be or not to be' soliloquy, where Hamlet not only questions life and death, but many of life's other uncertainties as well. However, the most important theme in the development of Hamlet is revenge and question 'Does revenge pay?' Revenge is a frighteningly bloodthirsty emotion of the victim.

The culture and tradition of Elizabethan age has a certain influence over Shakespeare which is depicted in the play Hamlet where the religious beliefs of the Protestants, Catholics and Humanists are thought to be asserted, although through interpretations by many. The uncertainty of life, death and life after death is illustrated in various forms like Hamlet utters in his soliloquy:

"To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country, from whose bourne
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have,
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards [of us all]."
(III, i, 76-82)

Hamlet, like Shakespeare, gets stuck to the ambiguity, though being a renaissance man, cannot leave the conventional Christian belief. Moreover the uncertain nature of madness is another concept to interpret which can be deceptive as well which is considered as sheer madness by some religious readings but an act of a conscious mind by some humanists' explanation "for the purpose of facilitating his revenge" (Walley 778)

Besides being ambiguous about life and death, Shakespeare has presented some worldly advices as well like in Act I, Scene III Polonius's advice to his son "Neither a borrower nor a lender be" and "Beware of entrance to a quarrel" which make us consider the practical, realistic mindset of the playwright to meet the psychology of a modern man.

None can change what's written in the stars for him. We learn that throughout our lifetime we make mistakes and experience situations, which teach us and prepare us for the future. Hamlet is no longer obsessed with morality and the unanswered questions that haunt him, relating to what lies beyond this life. He now believes in some "divinity that shapes our ends". He is willing to accept his fate, and no longer does he fight the injustices of life. He realizes that preparation is key, and that he is indeed prepared to meet his destiny. He no longer has an intense fear of death, and therefore can finally live. Hamlet's perspective of death changes through several situations and life experiences in different times of crisis.

The play of Shakespeare is well connected with the important matter in Europe at that time, the Muslim religion and culture and their relations with West. The play was written a century later after the Muslims were moved from Spain, and the readers and audience could feel the hostility towards Othello because of his origin, religious beliefs and culture. The conflict between Venice and Turks presents the same hostility between West and East. The Venetians are trying to protect Christendom from the coming influence of Muslim Turks, the irony is in the fact that Othello is sent to manage this mission.

Some researches state that Othello is a good example of Aristotelian drama: there are not many characters in the play, for Shakespeare this was actually the smallest set of characters, some certain distractions from the main plot line and concentration on several themes, including for example jealousy in this case. This play of Shakespeare proves to be of a great interest for its readers from the very moment it appeared.

The so –called moral plays in the past usually had the Vice figure, in Othello this vice figure is Iago, but this hero differs by his lack of motivation and by his malicious nature. Another reason of the popularity of Othello is considered its focus on two persons who were trying to define the society according to their hearts. During the wars in Europe in the 19th century the play was most popular due to the rebellion and upheaval of people, the love of Othello and Desdemona seemed more tragic and the nobility of Othello was even more underlined.

The main hero of the play 'Othello' is called a Moor, this would actually mean that his origin was Arabic, but in the play it is stated that he was black African. In England during the Elizabethan period blackness was strongly associated with something evil and with death. Stereotype of the Moor on the stage was as well connected with villains, but Othello broke this stereotype as he is a noble and towering personality in the play. In the setting of the play the action moved from Venice to Cyprus. This fact is really important for the whole plot of the story. The author presents Venice as the classically ordered city, where government controls the order with the help of laws. Iago was not able to make the trouble for Othello there as there was no immediate grievance of Brabantio. Venice doesn't allow chaos in the city. In this correlation the contrast of Cyprus is quite bright. It is surrounded by ocean and seems to not be the safest place. This place has as well some associations with mythology, here Aphrodite – the goddess of love came to the shore from the ocean. In the Cassio's greeting of Desdemona: "the riches of the ship come ashore...hail to thee lady!" this association could also be found. The readers could also return to the goddess when they are under the influence of Othello's feelings and deepest emotions. The readers do not actually meet Turks in the play, but their role is very pragmatic in reality. References to them and their culture have correlation to the main ideas of the tragedy. There is even an opinion that Shakespeare's main theme was the struggle between liberal Europeans and savage Turks. But this is probably in a way exaggerated. There are several main themes that could be separated in the tragedy. The theme of race was already mentioned, it is a really important one, as it helps the readers to build the opinion about Othello. Because of his race, Othello feels himself a stranger among the people that surround him. Because of his race, Othello decides to work carefully upon his reputation in order to be on the same level as white people. It has also something to do with the theme of Othello's pride. He is proud of himself, of his achievements, and the more pride he has the more his pride is hurt by Desdemona's betrayal. The theme of magic is related to the heritage of Othello. He is known to woo Desdemona with the help of magic as he is "pagan". In reality magic can be found only in stories and words of Othello. It should also

be considered some magic situation when the heroes could not find the handkerchief of Desdemona. This theme is as well presented through the Othello's trust into the symbolism and charm of that handkerchief. Actually this handkerchief is the main symbol of the tragedy, but it means different things to different characters – for Desdemona it symbolizes the love of Othello, for Iago – this is another thing to manipulate with, at last for Othello – this is the symbol of Desdemona's faith and chastity.

The theme of order and chaos is presented not only with the help of setting but with the emotions of Othello, at first his world was ruled by reasons and then by his emotions, as the outcome of it- he is no more capable of controlling his destiny. Another important theme is the theme of honesty, though this notion is used mostly ironically in the play; most heroes have to learn whom to trust and whom not to trust. The mistake of most characters is that they start to trust into the Iago's honesty. And Iago manages to manipulate people with the help of this false honesty and to misguide him. In the world of magic, created by Shakespeare – such a trivial thing as a handkerchief could mean so much in the lives of people – being connected with issues of love and fidelity. Love and hate are important issues for literature and for people's lives as well, these are actually two absolute opposites, but they are so closely related and mixed in "Othello". The antagonist of the story is Iago and his hatred causes him to do everything possible to destroy love of the protagonist hero – Othello, which finally leads to the deaths. The story is about blindness also, as every human suffers from it in this or that sense. Othello sets the most enduring tragedy on himself and people surrounding him, even his love. The mind of Othello is not that difficult, he is not used to the products of civilized life and he has little experience about women. He is a noble man and is not deprived of dignity and pride. He is very emotional, moreover – he is occupied with passion, love for him is absolute, he would not agree for something withered. If he loves – he loves with all his passion, if he trusts- he trusts with all his soul, and if he is jealous – he is jealous and angry with all his self. Jealousy is a sophisticated emotion and one of the ugliest - person poisons his soul and his heart with it and usually does harm to himself and his love and others around him. One can even have the feeling that he is eager to find the proofs that his Desdemona cheated on him. And his own passion leads to the fact that he is so easily fooled by Iago. Othello is made an outsider with the help of the color of his skin, it is not only some racial meaning in it, the author could have changed the country and the color of his skin and his nationality.

Not only is the depth of the passion a bright moment in the play – but also the presentation of the characters. They are all remarkable enough: noble Othello, gentle and sweet Desdemona, villain Iago, good – natured Cassio – they are all so distant from each other. The characters of Othello and Iago form vivid contrast; moreover their features of character and the shades of their inner worlds are lifted to an extreme degree. Actually Othello is a murderer, but readers can not look at him from this point of view – his nature is absolutely tender and confident, but the tortures of jealousy and his burning blood do their work. The author brilliantly describes it like a noble tide of deep and sustained passion.

Another character- the one of Iago – is one more example of Shakespeare's genius. It was not only in this work, that the antagonists are even brighter depicted than the positive heroes. The author was not only an outrageous poet and writer, he was also a good philosopher, so he could present all the best and all the worst sides of human beings. Not one generation of readers was wondering about the reasons for Iago to ruin the Othello's life. One thing is certain – the character of Iago cannot be viewed upon as a simple one. He doesn't have a couple of dirty stories in his past and he is called "honest" 15 times in the whole play by other characters. Maybe he doesn't even need any kind of motives to do evils, they are performed for evil's sake, but even if he did – he had such motives as wish to revenge after having heard the rumors about Othello and Emilia (Iago's wife), as jealousy of Othello's professional success, finally he starts to search for the excuses to justify his actions. The brightest female character of the play is without any doubts – Desdemona. She is sometimes considered to be a weak and submissive person, in reality after her first speech and after her real fury when Othello stroke her, also when she says to Emilia that she murdered herself, she proves to be strong enough. Thus she is presented from two sides, as a faithful wife and independent strong-willed person. The fact that she is able to forgive her husband influences greatly the readers or the audience. It seems rather hard to judge any of the main heroes of the tragedy only from one side, the only thing which is for sure is that

people can not stay indifferent to the story, it appeals to deepest emotions and provides food for thought about many things in our lives and in personal relations, let it be either friendship or love or hostility.

Shakespeare makes it quite clear to his audience at the beginning of the play that Iago plays the character of the common criminal, from his opening speech with Roderigo on Iago owing money to Roderigo. When Iago carries out his soliloquy we find out his philosophies on life and as an audience we become aware that he is a very clever and formulated villain this idea is not at all strange for Shakespearian play. In Othello Shakespeare presents Iago in this clever way as it would take a very scheming villain to go up against such a significant hero. We are aware of this hero being so unique as he is the title of the book, to use such an insipid villain this would create a great imbalanced enemy in the scenario. Here in fact it is found that each character had some form of quarrel with Iago but there after they are the best of friends. One of Iago's philosophies is first and foremost one should love oneself, but this is good to the extent that you can achieve what you want without the burden of others. Although I believe in the end if you base your whole life upon it you will become very alone as everyone will find out Iago's base line and will not agree with it. Overall we feel Iago has been a well thought out, a well created character and he is not indecisive in the slightest and he knows exactly how the plot is to be plotted.

The concept of uncertainty is again prevalent in Othello. It is always very difficult to read the thoughts of others even if the appearance is considered and same is the case with Othello who falls upon homicidal jealousy with no decisive evidence to prove the worth. On the contrary Iago seems not in the place to be disbelieved either as he should not have any reason to lie about the fidelity of Desdemona to Othello though we come to know from Iago, himself "I m not what I am" (366) when he talks to Roderigo in the beginning of the play and therefore, that very essence seems habitual to the notion of uncertainty. Thus, the uncertainty of life leads to the downfall.

William Shakespeare has depicted a truth of beauty in his famous book Hamlet. He has open-minded a realm of ideals of such man who is never found fickle minded and suffers from indecision to uproot the evils from the society. Hamlet was a philosopher, poet and social reformer but in spite of such quality concealed in him, he was not rigid in his conception to embed the action against evils. He was not bedded on full courage and social reformation as he was in the habit dedicating to find faults of the culprits. In fine, he was successful in doing the actual deeds, which he confirmed after lots of decision and logical arguments. The queen and the others identified him as their first foe and tried to end his life. In Hamlet, William Shakespeare has accelerated the views of conspiracy and conflicts of human affliction in a significant manner. The author has collected materials from social surroundings where men and women relationships and philosophy of reality and the realms of survival are coherent on earth by bringing a factual contrast of feeling of mankind. He upholds some literary manifestation in the pages of his mind, which acts like the mirrors of social unrest and evils committed by them.

Shakespeare was the only personality who understood the modern philosophy of life and the culture that traditionally reflects social conflicts and contrasts spontaneously. He introduced two trends of conflicts that were of tragedy and the play within tragedy. Hamlet was a play of misfortunes and social conflicts, which were accepted by the then social conditions and the crisis as reflected in his play for accelerating the basic strategy of life. If we judge the conflicts of Hamlet's mind, we will find such way of human psychology which is tremendously extensive and critical in due sense of social friction. Ophelia had deep intimacy with Hamlet but she had nothing to do for Hamlet. Due to the fact, according to her, Hamlet was not a man of parts but a man of cowardice for which she began to create her own world of abandonment. The three characters of Shakespeare's play are notable but they are nimble in the sense that they were bedded on fully hallucination and their own persuasions. These two characters are: Desdemona, Ophelia who had nothing to do something favorable and winning to their beloved.

It is an analytical sensation for human beings whether Hamlet had decided himself to die. It is his spontaneous conflicts of his mind critically because he had reactions and it was not credible on his part and takes evil notice to the superiors. He made arrangements of the play and observed the movements and

attitude, their feelings for the killings of his father. Regarding lunacy of Hamlet, he was not mad but he was inclined to pretend mad himself. It was happened in the sense, human beings are fickle minded in nature. He was in the way to commit wrong and for this reason he may forget the justice for self-devotion towards eternity.

In the last part of the story, we find all ends of both plaintiff and delinquent. Hamlet has been ended with all ends of his rivals and culprits. In his last message to Horatio, his friend, he has asked him to tell the actual event of retribution to the people of the world that Hamlet after getting unbounded mental repugnant and afflictions, he had had his revenge in the end against the killers of his father. In fine, we memorialize such Hamlet in the sense, no one is above human conflicts and the shrine of justice, being the king and the queen, all must suffer in the long run for all misdeeds. In this context, H.W. Longfellow says, "Man is unjust, God is just and finally justice triumphs." Throughout Shakespeare's Othello, the major theme of jealousy is apparent. According to Microsoft Bookshelf, jealousy, by definition, means "resentful or bitter in rivalry." The tragedy Othello focuses on the doom of Othello and the other major characters as a result of jealousy. The theme of jealousy is prominent throughout the play as it motivates the characters' actions. In Shakespeare's Othello, jealousy is portrayed through the major characters of Iago and Othello. It utterly corrupts their lives because it causes Iago to show his true self, which in turn triggers Othello to undergo an absolute conversion that destroys the lives of their friends. Iago, "most honest" (I, iii, 7) in the eyes of his companions, is, in fact, truly the opposite. His feeling of jealousy uncovers his actual self. Because the major theme of jealousy is apparent throughout Shakespeare's Othello, one realizes that the play focuses on the doom of Othello and the other major characters as a result of this jealousy. Iago is forced to expose his actual nature and Othello undergoes a total transformation from a normal human to a spiteful monster. Obviously, jealousy does cause people to change in horrific ways.

The philosophy of love for surging Ophelia up, it echoes from the lost past. Hamlet hears himself cursed by Laertes as the cause of her death and cries his grief aloud: "I loved Ophelia, forty thousand brothers Could not with all their quantity of love Make up my sum..." He loved Ophelia and he killed her. In that terrible paradox lies the essence of their tragedy to which the rest are blind. He knows the worth of such grieving, and mocks at it "What wilt thou do for her? Dost thou come here to whine, to outface me with leaping in her grave? Be buried quickly with her, and so will I..." No one understood his savage irony.

"Doubt thou the stars are five; Doubt that the sun doth move; Doubt truth to be a liar; but never doubt I Love." The attitude of Hamlet towards Ophelia is one of the greatest puzzles in the play. The exact nature of his feelings for Ophelia is left ambiguous. As most critics have agreed, Hamlet did once love Ophelia deeply and sincerely but he ceased to do so. Why? How can we explain Hamlet's conduct towards Ophelia throughout the play, his ruthlessness and savagery towards a gentle and inoffensive girl whom he had once loved so ardently? "I'll love in an honourable fashion" Ophelia herself gives testimony of Hamlet's genuine love towards her.

The obsession and need for revenge displayed by the two main revenge characters eventually led them both to their downfall. Not only did they hurt themselves, but many others close to them. Ophelia's death, for example could be blamed on Hamlet's desire for revenge, whilst Hamlet's death occurred as a result of Laertes quest to avenge his father's death. And Othello takes revenge on himself rather on Desdemona. Revenge shapes the entire plot of Hamlet as well as of Othello and could be blamed for corrupting Hamlet and Laertes, and Othello and Iago making them almost as evil as the person who started all the problems. Shakespeare highlights the moral implications of revenge, and how a person can cope with the situation to take revenge is easily solved here.

Shakespeare's plays are usually studied by literary scholars and historians and the books about him from those perspectives are legion. It is most unusual for a trained philosopher to give us insight into Shakespeare's greatest plays— Hamlet and Othello from the aspects of psychology, ethics, and tragedy. McGinn, a critic, says about Shakespeare, "There is not a sentimental bone in his body. He has the curiosity of a scientist, the judgment of a philosopher, and the soul of a poet."

Death and the ideas related to it are among the most popular and bothersome thoughts that have plagued men everywhere since the beginning of time. The fear of the vast unknown to which death leads has haunted the minds of mortal man and has caused him to come up with various ideas that attempt to explain this mystery. It is for this purpose that religion has come to be a part human life. With few exceptions, religions all around the world exploit this mystery by promising life after death if we follow its particular dogma. Humanists would scoff at these ideas, which they consider blind and pretenseful sins against. Hamlet and Othello, both are the believers of Christianity. But unluckily they can not escape from their ill-fate. And they become bound to submit themselves to their down fall.

Conclusion

In fine, it can be said that William Shakespeare's philosophy of life pivots on the theme of 'to be or not to be' as he himself was a victim of ups and downs in his life that he experienced through his true self. Hamlet is always indecisive and contradictory in his attempts to balance the revenge in the suitable way and gets stuck between his inner-struggle and reality. On the other hand, in the case of Othello, the mystery gets fogged up when he falls into ambivalence between love and jealousy before he kills his wife. The tragic situation leads one to unearth the reality as Othello and Hamlet; both of them realize in the end of the plays. But the truth bears no fruit to their own life as the audiences deeply feel observing the actions of the characters in the plays.

References

1. Bevington, David and Bevington, Kate (translators). "Un Capitano Moro" in Four Tragedies: Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth. Bantam Books, 1988. pp. 371–387.
2. Shakespeare, William. Othello. Wordsworth Editions. 12. Retrieved from Google Books on 5 November 2010. ISBN 1-85326-018-5, ISBN 978-1-85326-018-6.
3. John Kerrigan, Shakespeare's Binding Language, Oxford University Press (Oxford & New York: 2016)
4. Michael Neill, ed. Othello (Oxford University Press), 2006, pp. 45–47
5. Shakespeare, William; Ruffiel, Burton (2005) [3 October]. Othello (Yale Shakespeare). Bloom, Harold. Yale University Press. ISBN 0-300-10807-9.
6. Edwards, Phillip, ed. 1985. Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. New Cambridge Shakespeare ser. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 0-521-29366-9
7. Lott, Bernard, ed. 1970. Hamlet. New Swan Shakespeare Advanced ser. New ed. London: Longman. ISBN 0-582-52742-2.
8. Thompson, Ann and Neil Taylor, eds. 2006a. Hamlet. The Arden Shakespeare, third ser. Volume one. London: Arden. ISBN 1-904271-33-2.
9. Jenkins, Harold, ed. 1982. Hamlet. The Arden Shakespeare, second ser. London: Methuen. ISBN 1-903436-67-2.
10. Blits, Jan H. 2001. Introduction. In Deadly Thought: "Hamlet" and the Human Soul: 3–22. Langham, MD: Lexington Books. ISBN 0-7391-0214-1.
11. Bloom, Harold. 2001. Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human. Open Market ed. Harlow, Essex: Longman. ISBN 1-57322-751-X.
12. <http://www.enotes.com/homework-help/what-was-shakespeares-philosophy-life-335304> (William Delaney | (Level 2) Distinguished Educator. Posted on May 3, 2012 at 8:21 PM)
13. Walley, Harold R. "Shakespeare's Conception of Hamlet." PMLA, 48.3. Modern Language Association, 1933. pp. 777-798. 19 February 2009.