
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Duality in Hamlet's Character: Good and Evil Nature

Md. Rakib Hossain

Bachelor, English Language and literature, Gono Bishwabidyalay, Dhaka, Bangladesh; Master, English Language Teaching (ELT), Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Corresponding Author: Md. Rakib Hossain, **E-mail:** mdrakibhossain0y@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

Duality means having an opposite or contrasting quality or characteristic. Duality in Hamlet's character means that he possesses a certain quality or characteristic in his action, while in the same action, he conveys a completely opposite quality or characteristic. Shakespeare mysteriously creates his characters in his play: Hamlet, a character in Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, conveys contrasting stable dual qualities – good and evil nature – that make him both hero and villain. Throughout the play, his actions portray his courage, sacrifice, nobility, moral integrity, and determination, as well as his pride, vindictiveness, ambition, indifference, and unholiness. The author thoroughly read the play and studied the character intensively. The article focuses on the duality – opposite balanced characteristics – of Hamlet, which makes the audience pliable with his completely contradictory characteristics of him.

| KEYWORDS

Hamlet's character, Duality, Hamlet in *Hamlet*, good, evil, Hero, Villain.

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1. Introduction

Hamlet is informed and instructed by his father's ghost to take revenge for his murder. As a dutiful son, he struggles his entire life to kill his uncle Claudius, who is the murderer of his father. Hamlet, in case, takes various means to ensure justice during his struggles, which portrays the good and evil natures that flexibly fashion him as both hero and villain. Hamlet boldly follows the ghost and is determined to uncover the true course of his father's murder. He also intellectually proves the information about the ghost. Patiently he delays, out of apathy and weakness, killing king Claudius in his sinful state. He courageously kills the king's foolish advisor Polonius – Laertes's and Ophelia's father and skillfully manipulates the death of the king's spies. Finally, he kills the corrupt and deceitful King Claudius, doing justice to his father's murder and the people of Denmark, which proves his good and heroic qualities. However, he follows a path that is not virtuous, which degrades his moral integrity. He systematizes the deaths of his schoolmates and unjustly kills the father of his beloved Ophelia – mischief, unholiness, and unnecessary killing. Even though they were not involved in the murder of his father, his deleterious actions drive Ophelia mad, resulting in death. Instead of taking revenge – fighting face-to-face with Claudius – he hurts innocent people and kills the father of others, which proves his evil and villainous qualities.

2. Analysis: Dual characteristics of Hamlet

Hamlet is overwhelmed and saddened by his father's death and shocked by his mother's cursory marriage to the present king Claudius. However, Horatio informs Hamlet that he has seen a ghost hovering over the outer walls of the castle Elsinore that looks a lot like the late king – Hamlet's father, and it wears the same armor which he used to wear in battle. Horatio and the other guards did not follow the ghost out of fear and cowardice. Moreover, Hamlet intends to meet with the ghost. He courageously follows him and meets the ghost to determine the true incident, while the others are scared and inform him that it might be an evil spirit, and they try to stop him. The young brave Hamlet never vacillates to go further with the ghost, knowing the risk to his life:

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"Where wilt thou lead me? Speak. I'll go no further." (I, v,1)

The ghost could be a dangerous devil who can take his life on the spot. But his courage and determination make him tail the ghost. Finally, the ghost asks to listen carefully "lend thy serious hearing" (1.v. 5) and reveals his identity that he is the spirit of the late King Hamlet and "I am thy father's spirit" (1.v.9).

He learns – the actual cause of his father's death – from the ghost that his uncle Claudius pours highly venomous poison into the ear of the late King and kills him while he is taking a nap in the garden. Claudius seduces his apparently virtuous queen Gertrude – Hamlet's mother – and takes possession of her – he becomes the present king. Hamlet has been informed and commanded by his father's ghost to take revenge upon his father's soul "revenge his foul and most unnatural murder" (1.v. 25). But the spirit also commands him to leave the queen alone, in the course of her life she will taste the fruits of her labour. He points out that he must kill Claudius to avenge his father's soul and bring justice to his country, Denmark, and his people. Hamlet resolutely decides to take revenge, but he cannot believe the ghost so easily.

Meanwhile, a group of actors arrives at Elsinore. Hamlet makes a plan to write a story called "Mousetrap," which resembles the ghost's information, how his father was deceased, and then he instructs the actors to perform it on stage to confirm the ghost's information. When the murder scene of the deceased king is performed in the theater, Claudius reacts embarrassed and feels uncomfortable, which is observed by Hamlet and Horatio, as they planned before. He can no longer bear the situation and soon leaves the theater. They receive the same proof of his guilt. Intellectually he proves the ghost's information.

Having proof, Hamlet goes directly to Claudius' chamber with his sword to kill him but finds him in prayer, trying to confess his crime. Claudius is aware of his faults and finds no way to extricate himself from this sinful situation. Believing that prayer and repentance can be effective for a sinner like him, he tries to pray and repent of his sin. Hamlet finds the perfect opportunity to kill Claudius but holds himself; considering the situation, he believes that killing a person in prayer while repenting of his committed sin is not appropriate for revenge; it will rather be a reward for the murderer since his soul would go straight to haven:

"I, his sole son, do this same villain send

To heaven.

Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge". (Act III, Scene iii, line 77-79)

He takes time, instead of killing, to find a better opportunity to kill him in his sinful situation. He recalls that Claudius killed his father without giving him the opportunity to make amends for his sins and that King Hamlet now languishes in purgatory, awaiting entrance into heaven. He wants to kill him in a sinful state to be punished in hell for his evil deeds for all eternity:

"When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,

Or in th'incestuous pleasure of his bed,

At game a-swearing, or about some act

That has no relish of salvation in't,

Then trip him, that his heels may kick the heaven

And that his soul may be as damn'd and black

As hell, whereto it goes". (Act III, Scene iii, line 89-95)

Hamlet patiently waits. He is not like Laertes, and Laertes is not Shakespeare's hero. Impulsive foolishness is silly and mad, not courageous. Shakespeare's hero is thoughtful; after all, he is heroic due to his thinking (Hornback).

Moreover, Shakespeare shows Hamlet's excellence in proving Claudius' crime, and he does not kill Claudius at the moment of prayer. Hamlet intellectually proves the ghost's injection through an indirect approach by trapping Claudius through a play within a play (called "Mouse Trap"), which proves Claudius' offence.

Hamlet will certainly take revenge as he committed. Hamlet is not delaying because of sloth or fear. Rather he is refusing to execute an act he thinks is immoral on principle. Hamlet is a smart young man whose commitment to safeguarding his own dignity and morals constitutes 'for Shakespeare, the heroic social triumph of the play' (Hornback).

Shakespeare, however, proves that Hamlet harbours the false belief which makes him indecisive. Hamlet approaches to kill Claudius after receiving the proof – it resembles the ghost, but he does not kill him when Claudius is in prayer. He cherishes the belief that in prayer, a person belongs near to God. Whether he/she dies, he/she goes directly to heaven. But prayer and repentance are not effective for a sinner like Claudius, who possesses the benefit obtained by the sin committed. This false faith delays his vengeance:

"My words fly up; my thoughts remain below.

Words without thoughts never to heaven go". (Act III, Scene iv, line 97-98)

Instead of killing Claudius, Hamlet kills other innocent people who were not involved with his father's murder. Shakespeare demonstrates that Hamlet is more dangerous compared to the villain Claudius. When it comes to the number of persons slain, Hamlet easily wins. Claudius only murders one person by himself. In contrast, Hamlet murders three people with his sword and arranges for the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (Kravchuk).

Shakespeare depicts Hamlet's moral decline when he kills Polonius without hesitation. Hamlet goes to his mother's private chambers to confront her, where Polonius arrives before him and hides behind a tapestry, which Hamlet does not notice. Hamlet is furious with his adulterous mother, and when he frightens her, she cries for help. Polonius yells for rescue from behind the curtain. Hearing Polonius' cry for help, Hamlet thrusts his sword through the tapestry and kills him. When Hamlet discovers Polonius' corpse, he does not regret the sight of it. He does not treat the deceased corpse in a respectful or religious manner. His actions prove that he is no longer a moral or honourable character, especially when he leaves the corpse to rot in a hiding place without giving it a proper burial.

Using his position, Hamlet frequently disparages Polonius, making fun of him for his age, calling him names, and occasionally refusing to speak to him directly. Hamlet is aware that Polonius is unable to respond. Hamlet often uses physical violence against social outcasts; Osric, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern all receive the same punishment (Butler).

Hamlet commits a brutal act when he arranges the death of his schoolmates Rosencrantz and Guildenstern on their journey to England. They accompany Hamlet with a letter commissioned by Claudius, but they do not even know that they have the letter with them, in which Claudius orders Hamlet to be killed upon his arrival in England. Hamlet somehow manages to get the commissioned letter, and he exchanges his friends' names instead of his own. They take the side of Claudius instead of Hamlet. Their ignorance does not make them worthy of being killed; after all, they are Hamlet's schoolmates.

Their only crime is that they follow the king's order to investigate their friend's problem and then accompany him to England. Although Hamlet has no clue that they are aware of the fatal content of the letter they carry, in which Claudius orders the execution of prince Hamlet, he works to ensure that they are not only killed but also damned for eternity by being denied confession (Butler). Hamlet is no longer on his virtuous path or the path he was determined to follow in order to take revenge; rather, he commits one crime after another, which turns him away from his morality.

Shakespeare, however, also shows Hamlet's courage and intellectual abilities through the same actions. Hamlet kills the stupid, poor Polonius – the king's advisor, who keeps trying to prove his madness. He also arranges the deaths of his schoolmates Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who are assigned to spy on him. He declares them to be sponges whose task is to absorb the information and deliver it to the king:

"That I can keep your counsel and not mine own.

Besides, to be demanded of a sponge – what replication

should be made by the son of a king?" (Act IV, Scene ii, line 10-12)

They should have taken the side with Hamlet. Whatever the king intrigues, they should be honest with the prince as old friends. In fact, Hamlet demonstrates his excellent wit by customizing the death of his schoolmates, which was arranged for his murder. With wise foresight, he manages to escape death and brings them – the companions of Claudius – to their deaths, which is an exquisite, witty work that he has accomplished. He lets them have a taste of their own medicine.

Hamlet does not regret Polonius' death, nor is he shocked by it; killing him is like defending himself (Hornback). The deaths of the royal advisors – Polonius and king's spies Rosencrantz and Guildenstern – are also part of the revenge, for they help to advance the king's actions, like a body part on which a person depends to advance. The murder of Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern means that also makes Claudius weak as a lame man. Hamlet is technically taking revenge. He is fearless in his actions, quick-witted and intellectually stable, and thoughtful as Shakespeare's hero is.

However, Hamlet's morality degenerates when he unexpectedly rejects his beloved Ophelia. He provokes her beauty, treats her rudely, and hurts her with his words; his approach to Ophelia like a stranger is a lack of moral integrity that drives her mad, and in the end, she drowns herself in the river and dies. Hamlet behaves in this way because he intends to avenge his father's soul. It is admirable that he obeys the spirit of his father's command. Although he does not take revenge, rather continues to kill and hurt people. He can share his current situation with his lover Ophelia since she is the only person besides Horatio who supports and loves him, but his actions bring her constant mortifications.

Ophelia is being attacked from every angle by him. He makes fun of her beauty while also degrading her standing as a woman. Hamlet is going too far with his vengeance and harming the people he loves. That is a description of a villain (Kravchuk).

Shakespeare, however, proves Hamlet's morality, rationality, and devotion to his beloved Ophelia in the same action. His dismissive attitude toward Ophelia shows that he is also committed to his father's command and determined to avenge his death. The grief of her father's death and Hamlet's rejection drives her mad, and she drowns in the river. She is impatient and never tries to understand Hamlet's situation; her only intention is to marry him. When the ghost describes the true incident and orders Hamlet to take revenge and "Remember me" (I. v. 91). Hamlet swears by heaven that he will erase all his past experiences and other memories. Only he will keep his father's command in his memory in order to advance:

"All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
That youth and observation coped there,
And thy commandment all alone shall live" (Act I, Scene v, line 100-102)

Hamlet's refusal proves that he sacrifices his love until his father's command is fulfilled. When his father's command is fulfilled, he possibly reunites with his beloved Ophelia. Actually, Ophelia 'cannot maintain the role of a dutiful daughter and devoted lover' (Peck & Coyle, 1985, p. 60). Hamlet remains noble and devoted to his beloved Ophelia and his father.

Knowing about the murder of his father, Polonius and the death of his sister Ophelia, Laertes returns to Denmark full of anger, ready to avenge the murder of his father and the death of his sister. Meanwhile, Claudius makes a plan with Laertes to kill Hamlet to ensure Laertes' revenge and to secure Claudius' position as king. He arranges a friendly fencing match – a fight between two participants with blunt swords – in which, according to Claudius' plan, Laertes will take the sharp sword mixed with poison. Claudius also places a poisonous drink on the table in front of Hamlet's mother, and whenever Hamlet gets tired, he drinks from the special cup on the table mixed with poison in front of his mother. When the fencing match begins, Hamlet refuses to drink during the fight, but his mother, Gertrude, unknowingly drinks from the poison cup. Meanwhile, Laertes manages to hit Hamlet first with the poisonous sword, but during the fight, their swords are exchanged, and then Hamlet hits Laertes with the same poisonous sword. Soon Laertes realizes the effect of the poison; he reveals that Claudius is responsible for everything, and Gertrude falls down and dies due to the effect of the poison. Hamlet rushes at Claudius, slays him with the poisonous sword, and forces him to drink the remaining poison from the cup.

Shakespeare portrays Hamlet as a villain; his desire for revenge and the delay of his moral corruption led not only to his death but also to the unnecessary deaths of Polonius, Ophelia, Laertes and Gertrude, and Hamlet's madness, as Codon states. It is a "tool of social and political turmoil." That is true because his revenge and evil nature – moral corruption, also lead to the collapse and destruction of Denmark and foreign powers taking over the crown (Anderson). The late king, Hamlet's father, once fought and saved Denmark from a foreign power. 'That is what makes him villain of genius' (Butler).

Shakespeare portrays Hamlet as a hero; Hamlet fights for the rest of his life to avenge his father's murder. Revenge for the death of the deceased king required the highest degree of tact and wisdom (Crawford). Therefore, he is considered a good and honourable character. The deceitful Claudius and the fool Laertes are destroyed by their own poison. Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have received the fruits of their labor. Hamlet achieves his revenge and dies with honor as a soldier.

Shakespeare has made Claudius his own punishment, allowing Hamlet to uphold his moral principles and preserve his own dignity while also delivering justice to his father's murder (Hornback), and the people of Denmark, which makes him an absolute hero.

3. Conclusion

This paper demonstrates how Shakespeare miraculously portrays the dual nature of Hamlet – good and evil – in one and the same act. Hamlet's courageous actions in following the ghost, intellectually verifying his information, tactically manipulating the death of the royal spies, killing the King and his advisor, and dedicating his life to avenging his father's soul and emancipating his county and its people from the adulterous King Claudius make him an honourable soldier and true hero. In contrast, Shakespeare depicts Hamlet's pride, ambition, indifference, and wickedness in the same actions that lead him to the moral decay that destroys his own life and also results in the unnecessary deaths of Polonius, Ophelia, Laertes, and Gertrude as well as his country Denmark; finally, the foreign power takes over his land.

His good nature makes him a hero in genuine, and his evil nature makes him villain in genius. Shakespeare's enigmatic creation Hamlet is embodied with completely contradictory characteristics that reflect the deepest dark and light sides of human nature. Audiences, ordinary brains, can hardly cope with his philosophy but become pliable to support the contradictory impact of the same act.

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ORCID iD <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0650-5651>

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