

“Bounded in a nutshell, still counting myself a King of infinite space.....”

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ABSTRACT

Our familiar physical world is taken to be a four-dimensional Minkowskian space, whereas the mental world, or the psychological world constitutes an n -dimensional complex space where n is far greater than four, that is, expressing in mathematical symbols, $n \gg 4$ and $n \rightarrow$ infinity. The tragic hero of the Shakespearean play ‘Hamlet’ is mentally confined to a monomania of revenge i.e., avenging his father’s foul murder by his consanguinous uncle. Through the entire length and breadth of the play ‘Hamlet’, the hero is bounded by his dreams of power of throne. The play comprises of a few characters of varying importance. The set moves continuously. All the actors devise their movements according to block and the shadows they see on the stage. It is a very fluid situation. There is an organic relationship between the actors and the blocks. They have to see that the set is an extension of their own body. Hamlet presents himself to be a totally confused person with utter indecision. So, procrastination is one of his notorious traits.

Keywords: Tragedy, soliloquies, Universal appeal, Power, Murder, Avenging, moral corruption, Incestuous, out-of-joint, meta-commentary, Insanity, Illusion.

Section 1: Characteristics of Shakespearean tragedy

- 1) Tragedy must end in some tremendous catastrophe involving in Elizabethan practice the death of the principal character.
- 2) The catastrophe must not be the result of mere accident, but must be brought about by some essential trait in the character of the hero acting either directly or through its effect on other persons.
- 3) The hero must nevertheless have in him something which outweighs his defects and interests us in him so that we care for his fate more than for anything else in the play. The problem then is, why should a picture of the misfortunes of someone in whom we are thus interested afford us any satisfaction? No final answer has yet been found. Aristotle said that the spectacle by rousing in us pity and fear purges us of these emotions, and this remains the best explanation. Just as a great calamity sweeps from our minds the petty irritations of our common life, so the flood of esthetic emotion lifts us above them [1].

Section 2: Major Themes in the Tragedy of ‘Hamlet’

Through class discussion and other activities, students can discover how Shakespeare develops major themes in the play which include:

- 1) **Revenge:** Hamlet searches continuously for the answer to the question of whether or not he should avenge his father's death. His concern with right and wrong in religious, moral, and political terms causes him much inner turmoil. (Journal Topics 1, 2)
- 2) **Appearance vs. Reality:** The play contains many situations in which the surface appearance of things does not always match reality. Hamlet struggles to determine who his true friends are; the players in the acting troupe assume new identities; Claudius appears to be a true and just king and Gertrude his virtuous queen. (Journal Topics 4, 8, 10, 11)
- 3) **Sanity vs. Insanity:** In many ways this conflict is intertwined with the theme of appearance vs. reality. Hamlet's sanity or insanity has baffled critics for years. Even the characters in the play discuss inconsistencies in Hamlet's behavior, sometimes assuming he is really insane, at other times amazed by his clarity of thought. (Journal Topics 3, 9)
- 4) **Decay and Corruption:** Among the most powerful images of the play are those which reveal disintegrating situations, both in personal terms for Prince Hamlet, and in political terms for Denmark. (Journal Topics 1, 2, 9, 12) [2-3]

Section 3: Why is Hamlet so special to the global audience?

Shakespeare's works are timeless. Even after 400 years of his death, his works appeal to the learned and the unlearned. The bard of Avon has got an enduring appeal. After reading his tragedy Hamlet we can conclude that Shakespeare is still relevant. Hamlet is a psychological study of human nature. In the contemporary times, people are facing many psychological problems, loneliness, indecision; torments of family problems, procrastination, etc., same type of issues were faced by Hamlet. We can relate to his plays so conveniently. His popularity continues unabated and seems to continue in the future too [4].

"Age cannot wither her nor custom stale her infinite variety" – this is how Shakespeare describes Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*. The same rule applies to him. "Shakespearean stories are timeless; his writing is brilliant for the most part." 1 He was a literary genius whose work is universal in its appeal. He wrote across many genres from comedies to tragedies. Even after 400 years of his death, his works appeal to the learned and the unlearned, to the urban sophisticated people as well as the poor class. He grasps with equal penetration the intimate lives of the kings and the fools and the beggars. His popularity continues unabated and seems to continue in the future too [5].

Section 4: Puzzles on Hamlet's Madness/ Insanity

Concerning Hamlet's mental disturbance, A. C. Bradley writes:

And if the pathologist calls his state melancholia, and even proceeds to determine its species, I see nothing to object to in that; I am grateful to him for emphasizing the fact that Hamlet's

melancholy was no more common depression of spirits; and I have no doubt that many readers of the play would understand it better if they read an account of melancholia in a work on mental diseases.

Bradley is right. If we turn to Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia" we find the following:

The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. This picture becomes a little more intelligible when we consider that ... the same traits are met with in mourning.

This is the Hamlet that we see at the beginning of the play and generally throughout the first three acts. But a change surely occurs, and many critics have noticed it. Bradley (p. 120) observes in the fifth act "a slight thinning of the dark cloud of melancholy." This, he thinks, may be part of a new sense of power after his dispatching of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but mainly it is a "kind of religious resignation." According to O. J. Campbell, Shakespeare "does not leave his audience with the view of Hamlet as a slave to a kind of mental malady. The fatal wound in the Prince's breast restores his equilibrium and produces a brief interval of serenity." Robert Ornstein also attributes the improvement mainly to a last-minute confrontation of death, though he does see an improvement after the sea voyage. J. Q. Adams, who has made the only extensive psychological study of Hamlet's recovery, places the change in III.iv, with the appearance of the Ghost. According to Adams, the whole play breaks here:

From this time on Hamlet is increasingly better. He begins to display more interest in life, he takes on a more hopeful attitude towards the world, his thinking loses much of its morbid quality, and his confidence in human nature is in part restored. ... In the final scenes of the play—as in the jesting with Osric, or in the friendly fencing contest with Laertes—his melancholia has almost disappeared.

Adams' estimate of the time of Hamlet's change is convincing, for the last scenes must show Hamlet acting rationally; insight delayed to the moment of death does not occur for even so slow a thinker as Othello. But Adams has no better reason for Hamlet's recovery than that melancholia passes normally through several stages, and recovery is, in time, inevitable. Time was indeed a Renaissance explanation for some cures, but it was hardly a dramatic or significant one. Shakespeare worked his hero's cure into the dramatic texture of the play.

Because Renaissance psychotherapy has been inadequately studied, it may be useful to survey briefly some of the approaches. Perhaps the most favored for melancholia was a religious one. But Hamlet does not, because he is not really a guilty soul, fit the category written about by so many Elizabethan divines. Paul H. Kocher has ably differentiated

between the psychologically (or physiologically) and the religiously caused melancholia. Hamlet, unlike Lady Macbeth or Claudius with his "sick soul," would not have been classified as suffering from an afflicted conscience, which often had symptoms similar to psychological melancholia.

When divines did offer guidance for psychological melancholia, they were not particularly helpful. When it is not manifestly derivative from psychological works, their advice (as exemplified by Thomas Adams, William Perkins, and Bishop Abernethy) is to mortify the passions. If the suffering is incurable, according to Perkins, "wee must humble our selves for our unquietnesse of minde. ... It is Gods will that we should suffer affliction, and withall humble our selves under his mightie hand." There may be a hint of this attitude in the "religious resignation" which Hamlet has been presumed to suffer (or achieve) at the end of the play, partially in his acceptance of Heaven's will in the punishment which will follow his slaying of Polonius and more clearly in his "There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow." But Hamlet's *psychological* recovery, while perhaps related to this, is something achieved through the mind and emotions rather than through the will. I shall, however, refer to the religious theme later in the essay.

Moral philosophers were as busy as divines in offering advice and consolation. What is more, there is abundant evidence of their prescriptions in *Hamlet*; so much, in fact, that one might assume that they are held up as the ideal therapists. In a valuable article, "Hamlet's Book," Hardin Craig proposes that the volume which Hamlet enters reading (II.ii.168), and which he presumably reads during his solitude, is a familiar book of consolation, a work by Girolamo Cardano translated as *Cardanus Comforte* (1576). Professor Craig is undoubtedly correct in writing that "belief in the therapeutic power of books was characteristic of Renaissance students. If a hero found himself stricken with grief, as Hamlet did, it was natural that he should re-sort to a work on consolation. Cardano wrote *De consolatione* to comfort himself and all those stricken with grief (p.18). Craig stresses the resultant universalizing of Hamlet's plight if we view him as benefiting from this moving book, for Cardano makes it clear that most of humanity is involved in the struggle against grief, fear, and weakness. Like other moral philosophers, Cardano stresses reasonableness and, above all, fortitude, which is principally what the grieving Hamlet has to learn.

Cardano is in the tradition of Plutarch, Cicero, Seneca, Boethius, and Thomas More. These writers have perhaps too little sympathy with human weakness or with strong, uncontrolled passions. Cardano is typical of them in writing, in a passage that seems to bear suggestively on Hamlet:

As therefore to cowards and men of no virtue, the timely death of the father hath ever brought hinderance: So to noble mindes: it be occasion whereby to shew themselves as they be. Thys must also be set before our eyes, that both lyfe and death be the gyftes of God, and do evermore depende upon his providence. Therefore whosoever reproveth lyfe or Death, doeth in sylence disalowe & complayne of the devine Judgement, because both the one and the other is meete and profitable. (fol. 45^v)

A similarly stern note is heard in: "A follye I do think to comferte those that through debility of mynde do cast themselves into misery: as foule delight, and desperate revenges" (fol. 10^r). Nevertheless even Cardano recognizes the occasional inadequacy of stern reason in dealing with grief: "for often times, though reason comforts us, and teach us that neither mourninge,

is mete, neither that there is any cause of mourning, yet the sadde mynde of it selfe can not bee merye" (fol. 15^v). He must have known this from personal experience—a circumstance which lifts the *Comforte* above most books of consolation. Philippe de Mornay, another very wise and sensitive commentator on human misery, states what perhaps Hamlet and other students felt about the utility of the moral philosophers in dealing with mental suffering: "They pacify not the debates a man feeles in himselfe, they cure not the diseases of his minde."

Hamlet may envy Horatio his Stoic self-sufficiency, his moderation, his ability to suffer all yet suffer nothing. He may read endlessly in the books (or book) of the philosophers. But so doing does not greatly help him. Much of the advice of Cardano and the other moral therapists is reproduced in the play, but it is not given the best of spokesmen. It is put into the mouths of Claudius and Gertrude. In the second scene, Hamlet is told that the death of fathers is common and natural, that to mourn excessively shows a will most incorrect to Heaven, a mind impatient. His attitude toward such reasoning is that "'tis common," probably implying that it is too much a matter of commonplace books and not enough a matter of dearly purchased experience. It is Claudius who triumphantly lays claim to successful conquest of grief, and through the very precepts of the "common" moral treatises:

Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death
The memory be green, and that it us befitted
To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom
To be contracted in one brow of woe,
Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature
That we with wisest sorrow think on him
Together with remembrance of ourselves.
(I.ii.1-7)

Hamlet cannot so easily dispel grief and melancholia. Nor do I think Shakespeare felt it a culpable flaw in him to fail in so doing. With Brabantio in *Othello*, Hamlet might say: "But words are words; I never yet did hear /That the bruis'd heart was pierced through the ear" (I.iii.218-219); or with the grieving Leonato in *Much Ado about Nothing*:

I will be flesh and blood;
For there was never yet philosopher
That could endure the toothache patiently.
(V.i.34-36)

Perhaps what is fundamentally wrong with the comfort books and the books of stern exhortation is that they talk at the patient. Shakespeare seems to have felt the hollowness of their encouragement and the futility of their comfort. We know from later experiences in

treating melancholia that more dynamic methods, deriving from the patient's *experiencing* of emotion, are needed. These, moreover, would be ideally suited to drama.

Besides divines and moral philosophers, the Renaissance had many psychological writers, some of whom were also divines and some strictly physicians. But men like Timothy Bright, André du Laurens, Thomas Wright, Nicolas Coeffeteau, and Robert Burton, regardless of their area of learning, usually divide their therapy between the body and the mind. Therapy through the body was surely the least brilliant achievement of Renaissance psychology. Shakespeare ignores it in *Hamlet* (though he does not do so in *King Lear*). If Hamlet's disease had been humoral, then bloodletting, baths, and a very complicated diet would have been indicated. Significantly, none of those trying to cure Hamlet once suggest such procedures. Hence, most of the predominantly medical treatises are of no relevance.

Hamlet's relatives and supposed friends attempt to cure him by other strategies, most of them endorsed by the psychologists; and Shakespeare provides for his hero, in Horatio, one of the most commonly approved remedies for melancholia: a faithful friend.¹⁵ The friend should serve as someone to whom the sufferer can express his griefs and confide his secrets and in whom he can see the wholesomeness of sanity; a melancholy friend is dangerous. In all respects Horatio is exemplary. Hamlet sees in him a model of sanity, and Horatio is also an extraordinarily good listener. His "Ay, my lord" is his most characteristic utterance. But we do not very often witness Hamlet confiding any important emotions to Horatio. His most heartfelt unhappinesses are expressed in soliloquy. However, we should notice the degree to which Hamlet brightens up when he first sees Horatio, and even his exhilaration when he meets the two false friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

The latter two, incidentally, seem to be provided by the King not only as a means of sounding out Hamlet but as a possible way to cure the youth whose antics cause him and the court so much annoyance. They come to Hamlet as therapeutic friends. Rosencrantz explains to the Prince the psychological usefulness which doubtless Claudius sees in Hamlet's two schoolfellows: "You do surely bar the door of your own liberty if you deny your griefs to your friend" (III.ii.351-353). Guildenstern, upon receiving his charge from the King, exclaims: "Heavens make our presence and our practices / Pleasant and helpful to him!" (II.ii.38-39). And Claudius himself clarifies (at least ostensibly) his motives to both schoolmates:

so by your companies
 To draw him on to pleasure, and to gather
 So much as from occasions you may glean,
 Whether aught, to us unknown, afflicts him thus,
 That, open'd, lies within our remedy.
 (II.ii.14-18) [6]

Section 5: Reflections on Hamlet: Seeing Through Clouds, Rains and Sunshine

Hamlet is arguably the greatest dramatic character ever created. From the moment we meet the crestfallen prince we are enraptured by his elegant intensity. Shrouded in his inky cloak, Hamlet is a man of radical contradictions -- he is reckless yet cautious, courteous yet uncivil, tender yet ferocious. He meets his father's death with consuming outrage and righteous indignation, yet shows no compunction when he himself is responsible for the deaths of the meddling Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and the pontificating lord chamberlain, Polonius. He uses the fragile and innocent Ophelia as an outlet for his disgust towards the queen, and cannot comprehend that his own vicious words have caused her insanity. Hamlet is full of faults. But how is it that even seemingly negative qualities such as indecisiveness, hastiness, hate, brutality, and obsession can enhance Hamlet's position as a tragic hero; a *prince among men*? To answer these questions we must journey with Hamlet from beginning to end, and examine the many facets of his character.

Our first impression of Hamlet sets the tone for the whole play. Even without Shakespeare providing an elaborate description of Hamlet's features, we can envision his pale face, tousled hair, and intense, brooding eyes. Dressed totally in black, Hamlet displays all the *forms, moods and shapes of grief*. His mother cannot help but notice Hamlet's outward appearance of mourning, but Hamlet makes it clear that the overt signs of grief do not come close to conveying how much sorrow he feels inside:

For they are the actions that a man might play,
But I have that within which passes show,
These but the trappings and the suits of woe. (I.ii.84-6)

Hamlet cannot forget his father, even when all those around him have resumed their merry lives, content to offer the occasional conciliatory words of wisdom. The queen, considering she has lost a husband, offers up the rather unhelpful "Thou know'st tis common, all that lives must die/Passing through nature to eternity" (I.ii.71-2), and Claudius adds, amongst other things, "We pray you to throw to earth/This unprevailing woe, and think of us/As of a father" (I.ii.106-8). Hamlet's tremendous grief is intensified by this lack of feeling by those around him, and more significantly, by the cold-hearted actions of his mother, who married her brother-in-law within a month of her husband's death. This act of treachery by Gertrude, whom Hamlet obviously loved greatly at one time, rips the very fabric of Hamlet's being, and he tortures himself with memories of his late father's tenderness towards his mother:

So excellent a king, that was to this
Hyperion to a satyr, 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?... (I.ii.141-45)

The respect and awe Hamlet has for his father is seen in the above passage, as the Prince compares the late king to Hyperion, a Titan in classical mythology. The godlike view of his father is enhanced by the comparison of Claudius to Hyperion's antithesis, the satyr, a creature half-goat and half-man, known for its drunken and lustful behavior -- the behaviors of the new king, Claudius. It is no wonder, then, that Hamlet develops a disgust for, not only

Claudius the man, but all of the behaviors and excesses associated with Claudius. Hamlet begins to find revelry of any kind unacceptable, but particularly he loathes drinking and sensual dancing. As they await the Ghost on the castle wall, Hamlet hears the King engaging in merriment down below, and tells Horatio that the whole world is feeling the same contempt for his drunken countrymen:

This heavy-headed revel east and west
 Makes us traduc'd, and tax'd of other nations;
 They clepe us drunkards, and with swinish phrase
 Soil our addition; and indeed it takes
 From our achievements, though perform'd at height,
 The pith and marrow of our attribute. (I.iv.17-22)

It is unfortunate for the innocent Ophelia that the actions of Claudius and Gertrude have also tainted forever Hamlet's thoughts and feelings towards women. Based on the letters and gifts Hamlet gave his once-cherished Ophelia, it is apparent that he did love the girl, and likely felt those feelings of sweet devotion that his father felt for his mother. But, whether due to some overwhelming desire to become the mouthpiece for his father who cannot himself chastise his traitorous wife, or due to the sad fact that all the love in him has truly dried up, Hamlet turns on Ophelia and destroys her, with cruelty almost unimaginable:

I have heard of your paintings well enough
 God hath given you one face,
 and you make yourselves another: you jig,
 you amble, and you lisp,
 you nick-name God's creatures, and
 make your wantonness your ignorance. (III.i.144-48)

As the play he has arranged for the King begins, Hamlet takes a much different tone with Ophelia:

Hamlet: Lady, shall I lie in your lap?
Lying down at Ophelia's feet.
Ophelia: No, my lord.
Hamlet: I mean, my head upon your lap?
Ophelia: Ay, my lord.
Hamlet: Do you think I meant country matters?
Ophelia: I think nothing, my lord.
Hamlet: That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs. (III.ii.111-20)

Some argue that this scene supports the theory that Hamlet is truly mad; that, unable to control his own thoughts and feelings, he hates Ophelia one moment and longs to engage in sexual intimacy with her the next. But Hamlet is not expressing his desire for Ophelia; he is not lost in the fog of his own madness. Although he does not, this time, lash out at her with

overt cruelty, he is nevertheless once again heartlessly mistreating her with demeaning and disrespectful behavior. And Hamlet obviously is using Ophelia to further his facade of insanity – his actions are clearly for the benefit of old Polonius, who already believes that Hamlet has gone mad for want of Ophelia's love. Hamlet must be held accountable for his treatment of Ophelia. He is not incoherent or paranoid; his ferocity cannot be blamed on insanity. In his destruction of his beloved creature Hamlet is lucid and brilliant, fueled by rage and thoughts of Gertrude's betrayal. Ophelia is the only outlet for the hostility that he must keep secret from the King. The belief that Hamlet still genuinely loves Ophelia, and that his deep sensitivity and hunger for justice compel him to behave the way he does, allows us to conclude that Hamlet is at once so heartless and yet so virtuous. The actual recognition of his love for Ophelia can only come when Hamlet realizes that she is dead, and free from her tainted womanly trappings:

I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers
Could not, with all their quantity of love,
Make up my sum. (V.i.263-4)

Hidden beneath Hamlet's bitter cynicism and cruel words is a desire to embrace those that fate dictates he must despise. Even when he confronts his mother and is so relentless that the Ghost must intercede on her behalf, we know that Hamlet longs to show her affection; to comfort her and to be comforted by her. But love, pleasure, and tenderness all have disappeared behind Hamlet's encompassing wall of depression and overwhelming responsibility. The royal couple's actions have destroyed his faith in humanity, and he contemplates suicide. He declares "I do not set my life at a pin's fee" (I.iv.65), and, in act III, he soliloquizes:

...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; (III.i.60-4)

Any possibility he had of regaining a semblance of normalcy and happiness is gone when the Ghost of his father demands Hamlet seek revenge. Although Hamlet himself desires to see Claudius pay for his crime, he realizes the evil in the deed of killing the King, prompted by both "heaven and hell" (II.ii.586). The Ghost has placed Hamlet in a most unnatural position by asking him to commit murder. Hamlet hates the King for his treachery, but he would not act on that hate if he were not prompted to do so by the Ghost. Hamlet is an introspective scholar. He is reflective and pensive, and we see this throughout the play as Hamlet delays the moment of revenge as long as he possibly can. It appears to the audience that only a little time has elapsed since Hamlet's meeting with the Ghost, but, in fact, months have gone by. And the perfect opportunity to kill Claudius as he prays alone in his chamber is passed up by Hamlet, who makes excuses that the timing is not yet perfect. As Gareth Lloyd Evans writes in his book *Shakespeare IV*:

...Hamlet's arguments for not killing Claudius at prayers are both subtle and logical -- too subtle, in fact, considering the enormity of Claudius' deed and the virtual certainty that Hamlet possesses of his guilt. Yet he holds back his sword--his heart does not seem to lie in its blade. (35)

Hamlet's perpetual introspection does finally help him to overcome his great anxiety. When he returns from exile in Act V, we see a very different Hamlet. He is calm, rational, and less afraid of death than merely indifferent. He has come to the realization that destiny is ultimately controlling all of our lives:

Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting,
That would not let me sleep: methought I lay
Worse than the mutines in the bilboes. Rashly,
And prais'd be rashness for it, let us know,
Our indiscretion sometime serves us well
When our deep plots do pall, and that should learn us
There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will. (V.ii.4-11)

Hamlet is ready to confront the paradoxical truth that to avenge his father's death he must commit the very same act for which he seeks revenge. Using fate as the scapegoat, Hamlet can distance himself from the act of killing Claudius. He can now admit that he knows nothing of the world, "since no man knows aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes? Let be." (V.ii.209-14). Hamlet has reached the climax of his philosophizing; he has prepared himself for death.

When Hamlet does finally die, it is his princely qualities that make the lasting imprint in our minds. Hamlet remains

The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword,
The expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion, and the mould of form
The observ'd of all observers (III.i.151-154) [7]

There is a good deal of comic relief to be found in the pages of 'Hamlet'- Macready gesticulating before a portrait of Siamese twins resembling an unhappy union of Hamlet, Claudius and Kamawaki, the Japanese Hamlet, the very picture of dejection, inspired less, perhaps, by the assumption of Hamlet's burden than by the difficulty of persuading his audience to doubt the efficacy of suicide; the cock-eyed oriental romp of a Hamlet in the Uzbek State Theatre. There are evidences of cosmopolitan vulgarities in every decade. We must deplore some glimpses of a B.B.C. television production in 1947 which pictorially seems astonishingly commonplace, and others of the Benthall-Bailey Victorian-Gothic production at Stratford which give no idea of its sombre impressiveness. Nothing boxes the compass of changing taste and fashion more than the disparity of Ophelias. The sturdy matrons who charmed our grandfathers might have mothered the tender ingénues who partner our youthful Hamlets. Were we so deeply moved by Miss Jessica Tandy that here her portrait

as Ophelia seems to be less counterfeit than most and a true Presentment of her exquisite performance?

This book inevitably tempts any competent reviewer to artful quotation from the play it records. The play, however, is the thing. No photograph or drawing can revive the quality of an actor's performance. Mr. Marshall is surprised that Irving, the actor, shunned the photographer; Perhaps he was wise in trusting that he might become a legend rather than knowing that he would be on the record. There is entertainment and inspiration to be found in this fusion of enthusiasms. It will amuse the curious and delight the historian; it will instruct the student of acting or production if he is aware of its limitations. We may envy posterity who, in Sir Laurence Olivier's record on film of his conception of Hamlet, will have an absolute standard by which their own achievement may be measured [8].

Section 6: A Garland of pearls: A String of Valued Reviews

Hamlet, arguably the most celebrated of Shakespeare's tragedies, is back on the Delhi stage. Veteran playwright and director K Madavane's Hindustani adaptation for the Shri Ram Centre for Performing Arts (SRCPA) Repertory runs for more than two hours. Though he has directed plays in several countries including France, Africa and Australia, this is the first time Madavane, 71, has directed a Shakespeare play.

Very simply, Hamlet is the story of a young prince visiting home in Denmark to attend his father's funeral. He is stunned to find that his mother, Gertrude, has married Claudius, her late husband's younger brother. He starts seeing his father's ghost who declares that it was Claudius who murdered him. Hamlet vows to avenge his father's death.

Watch: Interviews with the director and the cast of Hamlet

Madavane, who retired as the head of the JNU's Centre for French and Francophone Studies in 2011, said very few scripts have got him as excited as Hamlet. The depth and layers in the character make it possible for the director to experiment. "One of the sentences in the play is that something is rotten in the kingdom of Denmark. You take out Denmark and put in any other country. The meaning will remain the same because there is always something rotten in every part of the world. In that sense, the appeal of the play is universal," said Madavane.

Read: The Queen of Hearts, a play on Noor Jahan

Madavane and his team's interpretation of a rotten kingdom is one in which no one tends to believe anyone; everyone is suspicious; there is no black and white; good or bad; there are only shades of grey.

In June end, Madavane conducted casting workshops for the play with the SRCPA repertory. He selected 24-year-old actor Saif Ansari, who has been with the repertory for four years to play Hamlet. Madavane had earlier directed Ansari in Tughlaq and Tartuffe.

Ansari said Hamlet is his most demanding role so far. "There is so much to this character. Every time I read the script, I learn something new about him."

Madavane has taken a few creative liberties with Hamlet. His Gertrude is a mother of the 20th century. He has lifted that character to that of a modern woman who claims her rights. "I am against a play based heavily on one character. It is unfair," said Madavane. "Gertrude believes that it is within her within her rights to get married two months after her husband's death," he added.

Read: Theatre festival in different Indian languages

Unlike Shakespeare's Claudius who is manipulative, Madavane has created a Claudius who is fighting a dilemma. The villain of the play admits that he killed his brother but he wants people to 'understand' him. "There are many angles to that crime. Morally it is wrong but politically it is correct. There are many examples of a man killing his closed ones for power.. In India Aurangzeb did the same," said Madavane.

In this adaptation, you will see Hamlet wearing a leather jacket and boots. Madavane's idea was to project a young lad who is a rebel and wears his attitude on his sleeve.

For Madavane and his cast, the play throws new challenges. Apart from working on details of various characters, the set—a set of rectangular blocks—is something the cast has not dealt with before. "The set is moving continuously. All the actors devise their movements according to block and the shadows they see on the stage. It is a very fluid situation. There is an organic relationship between the actors and the blocks. They have to see that the set is an extension of their own body," said Madavane [9].

It began, we are told, as a whim lubricated by strong drink. In 2012 the management of Shakespeare's Globe — the splendid replica of the Elizabethan open-air playhouse, built on the bankside of the Thames in London — was considering possible eye-catching new initiatives. In the midst of the merry collective buzz, the theater's artistic director, Dominic Dromgoole, impulsively said, "Let's take 'Hamlet' to every country in the world." No doubt even crazier cultural ideas have been proposed, but this one is crazy enough to rank near the top of anyone's list. Yet it came to pass. An intrepid company of 12 actors and four stage managers, backed up by a London-based staff that undertook the formidable task of organizing the venues, obtaining the visas and booking the frenetic travel, set out in April 2014, the 450th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth. They did not quite succeed in bringing the tragedy to every country — North Korea, Syria and a small handful of others eluded them — but they came pretty close. One hundred ninety countries and a series of refugee camps later, the tour reached its end in April 2016, the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death.

While helping to run the busy theater in London, Dromgoole managed to venture off and see for himself some 20 iterations of the production he had co-directed and launched. "Hamlet Globe to Globe" is a compulsively readable, intensely personal chronicle of performances in places as various as Djibouti and Gdansk, Taipei and Bogotá. The book is in large part a tribute to the perils and pleasures of touring. The Globe troupe had to possess incredible stamina. Keeping up an exhausting pace for months on end — Lesotho on the 1st of April, Swaziland on the 3rd, Mozambique on the 5th, Malawi on the 8th, Zimbabwe on the 10th, Zambia on the 12th, and on and on — they would fly in, hastily assemble their set, unpack their props and costumes, shake hands with officials, give interviews to the local press, and mount the stage for two and a half hours of ghostly haunting, brooding soliloquies, madcap humor, impulsive stabbing, feigned and real madness, graveside grappling, swordplay and the final orgy of murder. Then after a quick job of disassembling and packing, they were off to the next country. When one or two of the company became ill, as occasionally happened, the group had rapidly to reassign the roles; when almost all of them succumbed at the same moment, as befell them after an imprudent dinner in Mexico City, they had to make do with improvised narration and zany curtailed scenes.

Dromgoole explains that he set the troupe up in the full expectation that not everyone would last the full two years. Hence his insistence that all the actors learn multiple parts so that they

could switch around at a moment's notice. As it happened, the same 16 people miraculously made it through the whole tour. Perhaps changing roles from time to time helped them build the collective sense of trust that sustained them. Perhaps too, as Dromgoole suggests, they drew upon "the gentle support of each line of verse," so that even in the most trying of circumstances Shakespeare's iambic pentameters "kept them upright and somehow kept them moving forward, into the story and towards the audience."

Touring is particularly resonant for "Hamlet," since Shakespeare's tragedy features a traveling company of players who arrive in Elsinore and are greeted warmly by the prince. Hamlet makes clear that he has a lively interest in the theater, but that interest is not purely aesthetic. He asks the players to stage a court performance of an old play, "The Murder of Gonzago," to which he says he has added a few lines. His secret intention is to see if the play triggers in his uncle an involuntary display of guilt, thereby confirming the charge of murder made by his father's ghost. In the event, the uncle does arise in a rage and brings the performance to a halt, but like almost everything else in the tragedy, the signs are ambiguous. The poor players, in any case, could have no way to grasp why their show provoked such a response. A wonderful production I saw years ago showed them hastily packing up their bags in fear and rushing away.

The Globe company, of course, was always packing up and rushing away to the next venue. They did not deliberately set out to provoke moral crises and confessions of murder, even in the most benighted of the countries they visited, but they certainly hoped that the tragedy's celebrated interrogation of social and psychological ills — "Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, / The pangs of despised love, the law's delay, / The insolence of office" — would have some beneficial influence. Tragedy, Shakespeare's contemporary Sir Philip Sidney wrote, "openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue"; it "maketh kings fear to be tyrants." "Hamlet" seems particularly suited to this task because of what Dromgoole calls its "protean nature." It seems to work equally effectively in the urban heart of the most advanced industrial country and on the shores of the remotest Pacific island.

Dromgoole heightened this adaptability by refusing to give the production any strong interpretive twist. "The best way to avoid a misconception," he observes, "is to have no conception at all." As a reviewer in São Paulo wrote admiringly, "The text was acted in plain mode — no verbal excesses or unnecessary shouting, just a harmonious recitation of words combined with essential corporal movement." If there was a special emphasis at all, it was on the prince's lightness and wit. Hamlet was less the melancholy Dane than the jester in a corrupt world bent on outlawing laughter. "Our show didn't dazzle or explode," Dromgoole concedes, "but it worked."

Looking back on the initial motivations for his wildly ambitious project, Dromgoole ruefully notes two delusions: first, that "Hamlet" charted a journey toward peace, leading the troubled prince to a serene recognition that "readiness is all"; second, that it would have a comparably beneficial effect upon its audiences, leading them in some small way toward a resolution of their social and political problems. In reality, over the course of the two years, global problems only seemed to get worse, and the story of the prince, as the company performed it, seemed to tell not of spiritual enlightenment but rather of a bright young light that flamed for a moment only to fade and die.

Never mind. The surprise is not that Hamlet failed to heal the world's woes but rather that he belonged everywhere: "Hamlet the icon of restlessness for a world that never seems able to

settle. Hamlet who is restless for truth, unable to bear the lie his present moment is built on; who is restless for civility, trying to forge a new care in human engagement; who is restless for honesty and integrity and cannot bear people faking or borrowing their feelings; who is restless for calm when the moment seems a little too noisy, and restless for noise when it seems too calm.” A young person who refuses to make his peace with the sly criminal who has “popped in between the election and my hopes.” What better hero for our times? [10]

As if the poor guy weren’t conflicted enough, Hamlet has taken on an extra burden of ambivalence in the new Waterwell production of the play that bears his name. In addition to worrying about all the usual melancholy Dane stuff — whether to be or not to be, act or not to act, help or hurt his mom — he is now torn (to pieces) between cultural identities.

For this scrupulously reworked version of Shakespeare’s best-known tragedy, which opened on Sunday at the Sheen Center for Thought & Culture, the Prince of Denmark has become the Prince of Persia. Not that any proper names have been changed in Tom Ridgely’s streamlined production, which stars Arian Moayed (excellent in “The Humans” and a Tony nominee for “Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo”) and features the familiar Broadway faces of Sherie Rene Scott (as Gertrude) and Micah Stock (as Horatio).

But Jason Simms’s handsome set — with its raised sapphire-blue-tiled stage surrounded by intricately patterned rugs — immediately signals that we’re not in Elsinore anymore. And when the specter of Hamlet’s father starts talking, that isn’t Elizabethan English in which he wails; it’s Persian.

Though the production is set in the Iran (or Persia) of a hundred years ago, just after the First World War, there’s no denying its relevance in the early 21st century, a time of mass immigration and ethnic flux. That’s a notion that’s underscored by having each biography in the program begin with a listing of ancestral roots or the year the performer or crew member arrived in the United States. (It’s worth noting that the Iranian actor Mohammad Aghebatian, who was originally to have portrayed the Ghost and the Player King, decided not to make the trip to New York after President Trump’s proposed travel ban in January.)

The Waterwell “Hamlet” may be indifferently acted, for the most part, but it’s conceptually bracing, as befits a company devoted to reimagining and recontextualizing classics. This isn’t just another instance of a gimmicky relocation of a canonical work by novelty-seeking theater artists. Mr. Ridgely and Mr. Moayed, the founders and artistic directors of Waterwell, and their team are exploring the existential crises that arise when national identity comes under siege, and it’s remarkable how neatly Shakespeare’s text accommodates such an interpretation.

The royal court that is portrayed here is well on the way to becoming thoroughly modernized — and westernized. The men wear tailored European suits or military uniforms. (Nina Vartanian did the costumes.) Everybody speaks English.

The king, Claudius (Andrew Ramcharan Guilarte) — who has only recently ascended the throne after the suspicious death of his monarch brother — delights his new wife (and former sister-in-law), Gertrude, by giving her a Victrola, which plays the latest tunes from Tin Pan Alley. And when we finally meet the much-discussed foreign invader Fortinbras (Cary Donaldson), he is dressed in colonial whites, with a pith helmet.

As for Hamlet, the son of Gertrude and the murdered king, he more or less fits into this Western *mise-en-scène*, with his Edwardian attire and wire-rimmed spectacles. He’s

obviously not in a celebratory mood. But in Mr. Moayed's performance, he's also an unusually well-behaved Hamlet, deferential to the point of meekness.

And then he meets the ghost of his dead father (Barzin Akhavan), in that classic awakening-of-conscience scene, given an extra spin of guilt here. For this ghost speaks only in Persian, a reminder of the extent to which his country has uprooted itself. The next time we see Hamlet, he will have forsaken his Western mourning weeds for traditional Iranian garb.

That's the form his "antic disposition" takes, to antagonize his uncle and make the court believe he is mad. And every so often, especially in moments of passion, Hamlet will speak not in English but in Persian. When the traveling players come to Elsinore, to enact a story very similar to that of the death of Hamlet's father, it is in Persian that they perform. And when Ophelia (a mostly very sane-seeming Sheila Vand) goes mad, her lamentations are also in Persian.

For those unfamiliar with "Hamlet," such bilingualism may make the production difficult to follow. The soliloquies, for the record, remain in English, though they have been shrunk in many cases. One of Hamlet's best-known monologues (beginning "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I") has been cut altogether.

The "To be or not to be" speech that every English lit student knows has been moved from the third act to the fifth. It is delivered by Mr. Moayed in a spirit of calm resignation, which suggests a new spiritual acceptance of his destiny by Hamlet. I am not a scholar of world religions, but it seems to me that substituting an Islamic reading for a Christian one here is not a strain.

Those are the kind of reflections inspired by this "Hamlet," which is more intellectually than emotionally stimulating. Few of the performers, including the generally subdued Mr. Moayed, bring much in the way of psychological revelation or passion to their line readings. The exceptions include Ajay Naidu, a hyper spinmeister of a Polonius; Amir Arison, as an anger-ridden Laertes; Sathya Sridharan, who is spot on as the foppish Osric; and Ms. Scott, who brings a whisper of Jackie Kennedy to her sensuous, uneasy Gertrude.

The production's real core of feeling, though, emanates from the original music by the eminent Iranian songwriter Mohsen Namjoo. Performed live by Mr. Namjoo and Yahya Alkhansa, its undulating, insistent melodies pulse as an admonitory aural backdrop to Hamlet's road to resolution, a magnetic reminder of where he came from and what he has lost [11].

Section 7: Hamlet, The Game of Thrones, The Door And the Relationship

Just as in *Hamlet*, the real point of the production in 'Game of Thrones' and in the final holding of "The door" a TV Series to date isn't the play itself but the impact it has on the character who's watching it — Hamlet stages a version of his father's murder to see if watching it makes his uncle Claudius act guilty enough to assassinate. In *Game of Thrones'* take, Arya, after watching a staged version of her father's execution and meeting the real-life players behind it, is forced to think about what her planned assassination means.

She might also be forced to think about what the Stark family, and the power it seeks, really means to the common people of Westeros — the people we don't typically hear from on the show. The actual style of the play didn't he was close to *Hamlet* as it did to 16th-century Italian commedia dell'arte, with its exaggerated, archetypical characters and rhyming verse,

and commedia dell'arte's English relative "Punch and Judy," with its bawdy, violent physical humor.

Both forms were designed to appeal to the masses and to satirize those in power — albeit more subtly than this play did, using broad archetypes instead of actually naming and shaming current rulers.

To *Game of Thrones'* common people, or smallfolk, all the drama and trauma over who is or isn't going to be king is literally a joke. They're all buffoons, probably, and none of them has gone to help the little guy.

And maybe the commoners have the right idea here, as Bran's epic escape from the White Walkers and their hordes of zombie wights reminded us. Remember the White Walkers? The guys who are a lot more like a force of nature than just another warring tribe? The ones who might totally annihilate humanity while humanity is too busy bickering over who gets to sit in the pointiest of pointy chairs?

That scene at the weirwood tree, with the White Walkers parting the ring of fire, feels a little bit like *Game of Thrones* showrunners David Benioff and D.B. Weiss waving their arms and shouting, "Hey! Hey, guys! Remember that this whole series of books is called *A Song of Ice and Fire*?"

Other parts of "The Door" felt like Benioff and Weiss responding directly to the show's critics. When the "nudity" warning appeared onscreen at the beginning of the show, people at my watch party joked about how it definitely wasn't going to be a penis, in reference to how *Game of Thrones* has long been criticized for its willingness to show full frontal female nudity but not full frontal male nudity.

'The 'door' was just a meta-commentary on the whole TV series. But the play is the thing' and the main stuff [12].

Section 8: Closing Remarks

Hamlet is a play of paradoxes and perhaps the greatest of these is that the protagonist who reveals more of his mind than any other in Shakespeare remains something of an impenetrable mystery. His enigma would continue to remain the secret of an exhaustible fascination. The exciting new Hamlets, i.e., Hamlet-play acting would obviously set in turbulent modern-day metropolis or mega-poles. Social issues are likely to be front-and-centre. The play actors and directors like Riz Ahmed [13-14] would rap and campaign on behalf of immigrants a refugees arising out of the Syrian crisis, Rohingya crises and some similar others to crop up with the passage of time.

In fine, on one hand we come to see reports emanating from western quarters on atrocities perpetrated on Rohingyas [15] which are, in the main, of academic interest while on the other a segment of the Rohingyas are being armed to teeth, indoctrinated and trained by undesirable elements which in all likelihood will abet the growth of radical Islam and eventually terror. This looks plausible as the actors involved are against any kind of peace and tranquillity in the region. Affected areas will not be confined to Myanmar alone. Bangladesh and southern Thailand may feel the heat too. Thus all round alertness seems now called for [16]. Furthermore; the socio-religious strifes over Jerusalem would be another globalistic symbolic pivot for tilting the scales in favour of either the Israelis or the Arabs. Historically, the move to declare Jerusalem to be the capital of Israel has been a favourite bogey in the run up to the US presidential elections given the power of the Jewish lobby. It

has been put on the backburner post the elections as the derivative value and potential outcomes emanating from such a contentions declaration, simply do not make sense.

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