

The Miasma of Status Complex in Shakespeare's Hamlet

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ABSTRACT

Power and authority have always proved to be the potently integral ingredients of man's sense of honor. It has been this sense, which has given birth to the melancholic terms like, the lowers and the uppers. This hunger for the privileged authority may be seen in different socio-political contexts, but the focal point of this study is undoubtedly the nature of the power desire of the highly privileged strata of the royal world of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Indeed, this study was an attempt to scrutinize the selected characters of the play namely, Claudius, Gertrud and Polonius, whose identity was firmly connected to their royal status. These characters did anything possible either to gain or to secure their socio-political positions; they blatantly sacrificed different lives to meet their goals. Furthermore, the study tried to show that if the major powers received status, which was not consistent with their capabilities, actions and merits, eventually, they would lead the society to the oozy ocean of blood.

KEYWORDS: Hamlet, miasma, complex, status, identity.

1- INTRODUCTION

Power and authority create a deep sense of superiority, which leaves a honey coated taste of *otherness*. Each and every individual strives to have a share of this alluring sense of existence and identity. Power can be both good and bad. It can be good when it is owned by those, who are free from the inferiority and superiority complexes, but it can be disastrous if it is used as a destructive instrument by those who are suffering from the same complexes. Most of the bloody wars, which have covered the world with the gloomy shroud of blood, are the aftermath of power maniac politicians, who are indeed the menace to the innocent common mass. As. (Volgy, e tal. 2011: 10-11) assert:

If status matters, then the quantity and type of status a major power possesses should also matter. Status- consistent major powers—those states whose capabilities and foreign policy activities are matched by full status attribution—should have the most legitimacy and influence and should behave differently from status- inconsistent major powers or from nonmajor powers.

The most tragic and appalling trait of man is his totalizing sense of movement of life. In this linear movement, he expects each coming fragment to be more promising than the previous one; otherwise, he deems it a tragic failure. This sense of failure infects man's mind, soul and more dreadfully his conscience. A corrupt and infected conscience does not hesitate to pave all the hurdles and stumbling blocks to sweep to power, and a corrupt power is a kind of mental plague, which simply leads to dementia. There are certain categories of individuals who find the true essence of existence in attaining the sense of superiority. As Adler (1997: 31) claims' 'life is the attainment of a goal or ideal form, and it is the striving for superiority that sets it in motion.'

There are three hazardously destructive traits of duality of *self* in individuals, which may lead to detrimental repercussions:

- 1- A harmful comparison and contrast, which makes one degrade or devalue others. Individuals with such traits search for success and superiority in others' failure. Indeed such characters are ready to bulldoze even humanity, simply to reach their preconceived goals.
- 2- Flattery is another harmful trait, which might receive a temporary appreciation and approbation, but in a long run will leave a repulsive impact on the surrounding atmosphere.
- 3- Passivity and submissiveness are two fragile traits of certain individuals, which make them quite susceptible and vulnerable to any unexpected exploitation.

The miasma of treason and duality of identity seem to be the heartrending aftermath of the world where we witness the fast moving speed of class segregation. Almost most of us, very easily turn a blind eye to the miserable plight of the trampled paupers, and much more easily give a moral and social attestation seal to the greed and wantonness of the affluent, and consequently life becomes an

intolerable burden where caring and sharing seem to be ridiculous. According to Hooks (2000: 65) “ Indeed, as a nation where the culture of narcissism reigns supreme, where I, me, and mine are all that matters, greed becomes the order of the day”. Further, very aptly, he adds:

When honest caring citizens, especially our political leaders, are corrupted by longings for fame, wealth, and power, it demoralizes everyone who wants justice for all. Hopelessness generates inactivity. It is not easy to ward off the seductive temptations calling to everyone daily in a culture of excess. Constant vigilance is required to sustain integrity. None of us are exempt. The possibility of greed taking hold in all our psyches is ever present. It can be and often is the oppressor within. Confronting this reality without fear or shame is the only way we garner the moral strength to confront and overcome temptation and corruption.(.71)

Hamlet the play

Shakespeare has drawn a striking socio-political and religious picture of the renaissance England, where still the thin traces of medievalism are observed. Shakespeare, through his characters, namely, Claudius and Gertrude’s marriage has shown how they have resisted against the religious metanarrative, as Hooti (2011: 335) comments:

Derrida’s focus on logocentrism is decentring religion which is the chaotic focal point in Shakespeare’s Hamlet. According to the practiced Christian principles during the renaissance a man could not marry his brother’s widow. Hence, Claudius’ marriage to Gertrude is an anti-logocentric act.

On the other hand, we see Hamlet as a student of the religious principles studying at the Wittenberg University, whose religious beliefs make him mentally, oscillate between taking or not taking a revengeful action.

Indeed, Shakespeare gives a vivid picture of man’s sense of slavery. During the Medieval Age, man is imprisoned within the domain of the papal authority, and after breaking the shackles of the papacy, he imprisons himself within his own psychological swamp.

Claudius as a status maniac character

Claudius is the leading character, whose actions are a jarring alarm to the socio-political and religious notions of the renaissance world. His firm determinism and high spirit control the dubious depressing situation of the king Hamlet’s death, and above all, his bohemian marriage to his own brother’s widow triggers a moot milestone in the society. His hasty marriage to Gertrude shows his high sense of resistance against the well-practiced metanarratives. Indeed, Claudius is leashed by his highly repressed complexes, which make him take any unexpected decisions. De Mijolla (2005), gives the following definition of a complex:

A complex is the more- or less-repressed standardization of emotionally strong conflictual experiences. When these experiences are triggered, either by certain themes (such as new pieces of information), or emotions (in which case they are called “constellations”), the complex produces a reaction, such that the individual perceives the situation in terms of the complex (with a distortion of perception), and responds with an emotional overreaction, which mobilizes the processes of stereotyped defense. (320).

It is not easy to decide to harm a person, let alone murdering one’s own sibling. So, what happens that such a dreadful decision is made? One must be strongly involved in invincible complexes, which can defy his common sense to take inhumane decisions, as Claudius does.

Claudius does everything to gain the leading royal status; he tries to bring plausible reasons to justify his hasty marriage and the occupation of the royal throne, as in his first public appearance after marriage, he says:

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. Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen, th’ imperial jointress to this warlike state, have we—as ’twere with a defeated joy, with an auspicious and a dropping eye, with mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage, in equal scale weighing delight and dole—taken to wife. Nor have we herein barred your better wisdoms, which have freely gone with this affair along. For all, our thanks. Now follows that you know. Young Fortinbras, holding a weak supposal of our worth or thinking by our late dear brother’s death our state to be disjoint and out of frame, colleague’d with the dream of his advantage, he hath not failed to pester us with message importing the surrender of those lands lost by his

father, with all bonds of law, to our most valiant brother. So much for him. (Alexander, 1991: 1030-henceforth Alexander)

This monologue shows Claudius's meticulously masterminded family coup. He tries to present a normal picture of the whole scenario, but all in vain, as the ghost divulges his mysterious murder, all the preconceived calculations made by Claudius shatter down.

Hamlet's feigned madness and his constant caustic remarks disharmonize Claudius' fabricated normal atmosphere, and after the Mouse Trap Play, he absolutely loses his normal life and decides to remove Hamlet from the arena, which ultimately leads not only to the death of Hamlet but also to the death of Gertrude, Polonius, Laertes, Guildenstern, Rosencrantz and his own death as well.

Gertrude a Queen maniac

Gertrude is a quite passive character, who seems to enjoy remaining a queen. She does not seem to bother how to maintain this status. It seems nothing has changed in her life. She was a queen and still is a queen. She does not care who her husband is, indeed for her to remain a queen has the paramount importance; that is why, very easily, she surrenders herself to Claudius. She does not care about her only son, Hamlet; she is so absorbed in her new life that has clean forgotten her deceased husband's two month old demise. Even, she complains that why Hamlet does not forget his father's death, which consequently invites his ironic reaction:

GERTRUDE: Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted color off, and let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark. Do not forever with thy vailèd lids seek for thy noble father in the dust. Thou know'st 'tis common. All that lives must die, passing through nature to eternity.

HAMLET: Ay, madam, it is common.

GERTRUDE: If it be, why seems it so particular with thee?

HAMLET: "Seems," madam? Nay, it is. I know not "seems." 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother, nor customary suits of solemn black, nor windy suspiration of forced breath, no, nor the fruitful river in the eye, nor the dejected 'havior of the visage, together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief, that can denote me truly. These indeed "seem," for they are actions that a man might play. but I have that within which passeth show, these but the trappings and the suits of woe. (Alexander: 1031)

This dialogue gives a vivid picture of the fact that though Gertrude has maintained her status as a queen, but has lost her status as a mother, which shows Queenhood priority over Motherhood.

Polonius as a Submissive Character

Polonius is a character of bombastic rhetoric, who is constantly mocked and depreciated by Hamlet. As McGinn, (2006: 59) comments, "Polonius is the frequent butt of Hamlet's satirical wit; Hamlet mocks him mercilessly. And Polonius is indeed a fountain of verbose banality and spurious wisdom." Polonius's character has a close resemblance to Gertrude's; both are weak and susceptible to dictation and exploitation. Indeed, Polonius is the man of sycophantic rhetoric. His sole goal seems to be winning the attention of the king, Claudius. At all costs, he wants to remain dangling within the royal domain. He does his best to prove himself the most vigilant and loyal to the king. As he says to the king "I hold my duty, as I hold my soul, both to my God and to my gracious king." (Alexander: 1040) He sacrifices his daughter's love to maintain his affinity to the king. Like Gertrude, he does not care who the king is, for him the maintenance of his status is important. As Gertrude sacrifices Hamlet to preserve her status as the queen, he sacrifices Ophelia to maintain and strengthen his status within the royal domain. The following dialogue between Polonius and Ophelia supports this claim:

POLONIUS: Marry, well bethought. 'Tis told me he hath very oft of late given private time to you, and you yourself have of your audience been most free and bounteous. If it be so as so 'tis put on me—and that in way of caution—I must tell you, you do not understand yourself so clearly as it behooves my daughter and your honor. What is between you? Give me up the truth.

OPHELIA: He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders of his affection to me.

POLONIUS: Affection! Pooh, you speak like a green girl, unsifted in such perilous circumstance. Do you believe his "tenders," as you call them?

OPHELIA: I do not know, my lord, what I should think.

POLONIUS: Marry, I'll teach you. Think yourself a baby that you have ta'en these tenders for true pay, which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly, or—not to crack the wind of the poor phrase, running it thus—you'll tender me a fool. (Alexander: 1034)

Polonius tries to seize his daughter's thinking; he wants to disown her from her mental independence as a thinking social animal. He makes the same attempt with his son, Laertes as well.

Indeed, he wants to impose his thoughts upon his children. Actually, as he shackles his children within his mental dungeon; at the same time, he tries to orchestrate his thought line as well to satisfy the king.

This sense of flattery and slavery does not only lead to Polonius's death, but also the madness and death of Ophelia and Laertes as well.

Conclusion

This study tried to show how the greed for power and high status can be devastating and traumatizing. The studied displayed how the unquenchable thirst for high status pushed everyone to the stormy and tumultuous flood of blood. It wanted to show that life should be appreciated and lived within every given fragment; otherwise the tormenting apprehension of the coming episodes of life makes the whole life a tragedy.

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