

## “Hamlet” as a revenge play

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### Point out and elucidate the unconventional aspects that characterize “Hamlet” as a revenge play. [2021]

William Shakespeare’s (1564-1616) “*Hamlet*,” written between 1599-1601, is one of the greatest tragedies ever written. On the surface, it seems like a revenge play because Hamlet tries to take revenge for his father’s murder. But Shakespeare made it very different from other revenge plays of his time. He added deep thoughts, emotions, and moral questions that made “*Hamlet*” an unconventional revenge tragedy. The play is not only about killing the guilty; it is about Hamlet’s inner conflict.

**Hamlet’s Doubt about the Ghost:** In most revenge plays, the hero quickly tries to take his revenge. But in “*Hamlet*,” the ghost of King Hamlet only begins a long journey of doubt in Hamlet’s mind. The ghost of King Hamlet tells Hamlet that he was murdered by his brother, Claudius, who has taken the throne. The ghost tells Hamlet to avenge his murder. Normally, a typical hero would plan immediate action. But Hamlet does not. He is confused about whether the ghost is truly his father or an evil spirit trying to mislead him. He thinks:

*“The spirit that I have seen may be a devil.”*

This hesitation makes

“*Hamlet*”

different from traditional revenge plays, which focus more on action than on thought.

**Hamlet’s Overthinking and Delay:** Unlike the heroes of traditional revenge plays, Hamlet spends a lot of time thinking. He is not a man of action. He thinks and overthinks, but is unable to decide whether to kill his uncle or not. He suffers from mental pain. In his famous speech, he says,

*“To be or not to be, that is the question.”*

Here, Hamlet wonders whether it is better to live and suffer or to die and end all pain. His mind is full of questions and thoughts, so he cannot act immediately. This long inner debate adds a psychological depth that was new and unusual in Elizabethan drama. Thus,

*“Hamlet”*

is a revenge play with a thinking hero, not a fighting one.

**Moral Struggle:** Hamlet is not cruel by nature. He feels a strong sense of morality. When he finds Claudius praying, he gets a chance to kill him. But he stops himself. Hamlet says,

*“Now might I do it pat, now he is praying.”*

He fears that killing Claudius during prayer will send Claudius’s soul to heaven. Moreover, Hamlet’s delay comes from his moral struggle. He wants to make sure his revenge is right, not sinful. This kind of moral reasoning is not found in common revenge plays. So, Shakespeare presents a moral hero in this play, not just a vengeful one full of rage. Shakespeare shows that real revenge is not simple when the heart is full of doubt and moral thinking.

**Realism:** Shakespeare adds realism to the story. Hamlet’s madness, Ophelia’s death, and the tragic end of many characters show the real results of revenge. In old revenge plays, the hero’s final revenge often feels victorious. But in *“Hamlet,”* the revenge destroys everything. Hamlet kills Claudius, but he himself dies too. His mother Gertrude, Laertes, and even the innocent Ophelia die in the process. Just before his death, Hamlet says these final words:

*“The rest is silence.”*

The play teaches that revenge does not bring peace; it only creates more pain and death.

To sum up. *“Hamlet”* is an unconventional revenge play. The play focuses more on Hamlet’s doubt, inaction, and moral struggle. This revelation of Hamlet’s psychology makes him the most human character Shakespeare ever created. At the same time, this play becomes a different kind of revenge tragedy and Shakespeare’s finest.