



## The Impact of the Two Murdered Fathers on Madness and Death of Hamlet and Ophelia

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### ABSTRACT :

The murder of King Hamlet by his own brother, Claudius, and usurping his crown and queen, results in other murders such as the murder of Polonius. The murder of their fathers enhances madness and death of Hamlet and Ophelia. They suffer seriously from betrayal, resentment, and isolation . Hamlet fakes madness to avoid being assassinated by Claudius and to accomplish his revenge. Madness enables Hamlet to have his revenge just before his death. While Ophelia gets really mad when she loses her father and Hamlet's love, lost in sorrow till she drowns accidentally. Ophelia's madness and death change her minor character into an effective one.

**Key words:** *murder, madness, revenge, death*

### المستخلص:

أدت جريمة قتل الملك هاملت على يد أخيه كلوديوس واستيلائه على عرشه ومليكته الى جرائم قتل أخرى كقتل بولونيوس وأدت الى جنون ثم موت هاملت وأوفيليا. لقد جعلتهم يعانون بشدة من الخيانة والاستيلاء والعزلة. قام هاملت بإدعاء الجنون لتجنب تعرضه للأغتيال على يد كلوديوس ولكي ينتقم لوالده. وقد تمكن من ذلك فعلا قبيل وفاته. بينما فقدت اوفيليا قواها العقلية عندما خسرت والدها و حب هاملت و إنغمست في الحزن حتى غرقت عن طريق الخطأ. لقد نقل جنونها وموتها شخصيتها من هامشية الى شخصية فعالة ومؤثرة في الاحداث.

كلمات مفتاحية: *جريمة قتل , جنون , انتقام , موت*

### INTRODUCTION :



Murder is an evident theme in many of Shakespearean tragedies especially the tragedy of Hamlet. It is the murder of Hamlet's father that initiates the plot in Hamlet with the appearance of his father's ghost asking for revenge. The impact of the two murdered fathers on madness and death of Hamlet and Ophelia

Hamlet is the play of fathers and sons from the very beginning for Shakespeare himself has lost a son. Albano mentions that Hamlet is the most relevant play to Shakespeare's personal life because it exposes the link between fathers and sons, it is written five years after the death of Shakespeare's son Hamnet. The similarity between the name of prince Hamlet of Denmark in the play and his son's name Hamnet is obvious, as well as the emotional confusion, sadness and depression within Shakespeare that shades the whole atmosphere of the play. (Albano 2010:12). Shakespeare's emotional life must have some traces in Hamlet. The biographical attention to a work deriving from recycled materials and written for the public stage would seem inherently implausible, were it not for the overwhelming impression on readers and spectators alike that the play must have emerged in an unusually direct way from the playwright's inner life, indeed that at moments the playwright was barely in control of his materials. Hamlet can be attributed to a personal experience of grief and to sketch a long-term aesthetic strategy that seems to have emerged from experience. Wheeler argues that "the death of Hamnet left significant traces in the great comedies, particularly in Twelfth Night" (Wheeler.2000: 127–153). Hamlet has a worldwide fame because of its complex protagonist who mocks fate and criticizes the world as a place of corruption and decay and who is full of depression and sadness after the death of his father, the King of Denmark. The character of Hamlet "attracts the reader with fascination of a mystery that forever invites discovery and can never be wholly laid bare" (Osgerby 1965:1) Because of Shakespeare's bitter experience in losing his only son, the play is regarded as an autobiographical story. The rich emotional and filial relationship of the play certainly reflect the powerful and bitter emotions that Shakespeare must surely have experienced at the time of his own son's death. In Hamlet it seems that Shakespeare focuses on death and the father-son relationship: Shakespeare is, of course, known for creating some of the greatest characters in world literature; and, indeed, Hamlet stands out as the greatest of these great creations. Therefore, the reader should not be surprised that most commentary and criticism about this play focuses on the character of young Prince Hamlet. (Ibid:12) Nevertheless, this tragic play deserves serious concentration by the readers, because Shakespeare takes this simple medieval tale of vengeance and develops it into a tragic political plot and family flaw. Nonetheless, Harold Bloom says that Hamlet is of "no genre really, and its protagonist, who has inspired so many imitators, continues to be a unique figure, the most isolated character in Shakespeare, perhaps indeed in all of Western literature." (Harold Bloom 2005: 61)

In fact, Hamlet, the moody and uncertain character of the play, is both strikingly modern as well as classic character because he understands the meaning of the word revenge. His uncertainty forms one of the major themes of the play. Hamlet is forced to take his revenge several times, but he does not do it when opportunity offers. In this regard, Ian Nichols points out: "Hamlet sums up his feelings in his soliloquy, wondering whether it is better to suffer in silence, or to fight and die. He discusses death as a release from the struggles of the world, one which he seeks, but is too cowardly to take, since he knows not what comes after death. It is, perhaps, this reflection on death and why people go on living when life itself seems intolerable which makes the play



fascinating to audiences and academics alike". Ian Nichols (2002:50) In fact Hamlet is considered one of the highest tragedies of Shakespeare, and it combines both of his deepest tragedies and his best comedies. The philosophy of life and death is combined with an amazing story of the supernatural, treachery, murder, madness and revenge. They all interweave within the filial relationships. In this play Shakespeare presents, amongst others, two murdered fathers leaving two sons and a daughter; Hamlet, Laertes and Ophelia, the sons feel the filial duty to revenge their father's premature deaths while the daughter becomes absolutely insane. Drewry reports that all sons idealize their fathers, with Hamlet giving his father god-like characteristics, but their paths to filial duty quickly diverge as Hamlet questions the morality of the Ghost's call for revenge. While Laertes accepts the pagan code of blood vengeance supported by Claudius's court and steadily moves towards revenge. Hamlet delays because this code contrasts with his Christian faith. (Drewry 2004) Ophelia is the early modern image of the typical dutiful daughter during Elizabethan time. She is completely submissive to Polonius's orders just like any obedient daughter in her time. In every time they are together, Polonius controls the speech and her response is always: "I shall obey, my lord" (I.iii.136). Her personality is associated with Polonius since she is completely controlled by her father's will as a typical obedient daughter. Ophelia's fault is her incapability of understanding Hamlet and her inability to disobey her father's commands. Such orders make her unable to cope with the world of her relationship with Hamlet. The murder of Polonius destructs the relationship between Ophelia and Hamlet, despite the fact that he has just admitted his true love for her. Besides that Hamlet feels he must leave Ophelia behind in order to revenge his father's murder. It shows also that Hamlet has lost his faith in women. Hamlet sacrifices his love for Ophelia and his mother in order to pursue his revenge. Hamlet is willing to pay the ultimate price of his own life as well as others in order to achieve his final revenge. Hamlet denies his love because of his filial duty and so does Ophelia. She denies her love because of her filial duty as an obedient daughter. She chooses to comply with her father's direction regarding Hamlet's love. She changes her emotions and behavior according to Polonius's commandments by returning Hamlet's love letters. She tells her father: "As you did command I did repel his letters and denied His access to me". (II.i.109-111) The murder of Hamlet's father shows how relationships are vitiated by unholy passions of the mind. Hamlet's uncle, Claudius, kills his brother in connivance with Hamlet's mother, Gertrude. The murder of one character leads to the murder of another and so on. The first murder begins with the murder of the father of a son; king Hamlet, the father of prince Hamlet, by the hand of his own brother, Claudius. The Son, Hamlet, must revenge the murder of his father. Thinking of revenge leads Hamlet unwillingly to murder the father of another son, Polonius, father of Laertes. It is another burden that Hamlet has to undergo through his already complicated way avenging the murder of his own father. The death of Polonius is very difficult and cleverly used by Shakespeare and it is very important to comprehend its effect on other characters and events. It deeply illustrates the character of Hamlet. Denton suggests that it is one of the leading motives of the play. And that no other incident shows so deep a design, or is so appropriate for its purpose. "Hamlet, acting blindly through impulse, slays the wrong one; the result is — guilt. This warning, therefore, speaks from the rash act: Let no rational being give up control to impulse which cannot see, cannot distinguish, the nature of a deed". Man must, think before act. But, through thinking, Hamlet cannot have his revenge and kill the right person. That is his

dilemma; "if he acts, it is through impulse, and he falls into guilt; if he reflects, he cannot act — that is, he cannot do the Great Deed of his life, and so commits, at least, a sin of omission". So Hamlet must act through non controlled mind, a faked madness that gives him a chance to revenge. Acting through impulse makes Hamlet commit the same murder that he seeks to avenge, murdering the father of another son. Retribution will call up against him, a son at whose hands he will meet his fate. So this incident offers the profoundest illustration of Hamlet's character, and, at the same time, furnishes the motive of his death (Denton, 2009).

Ophelia is generally considered a minor character in Hamlet. She is an obedient daughter of her father's authority. As an Elizabethan female character, she struggles to have a voice of her own which she doesn't have. Her father's death derives her out of her mind. Nevertheless; Ophelia reveals three stages of her developing personality through events of the play. First the timid daughter who lacks the will to express her own self; second the one who takes on her own the mission assigned to her by her father and the king to test prince Hamlet's mental state; finally the mad girl who suffers the loss of her father and lover which lead to her own destruction and death. The murder of her father makes Ophelia mad while the murder of Hamlet's father makes him pretend to be mad, a faked madness. Madness gives Hamlet and Ophelia chances to express themselves more freely. Hamlet expresses himself through soliloquies while Ophelia expresses her oppressed feelings and sorrow through lyrics and songs. Her madness can be read as assimilation with Hamlet since it is how she revives Hamlet's love. Her madness is a kind of struggle to structure a character of her own. Her dramatic death symbolizes the Narcissus-like combination of her own images and the opportunity to recover her name of innocence with Gertrude's narration which belongs specifically to the kind of female mourning. Critics never consider Ophelia a complicated personality. Wagner believes that "Shakespeare intended her to be a minor character, using her sparingly and almost forgetfully throughout the plot and that she is an ironic parallel as compared with the queen "whose equally simple, rather carnal attitudes have led her into deepest sin". Moreover, Hamlet's hatred towards his mother impels him to label Ophelia as the same type of woman (Wagner, 1963). To Hamlet, Ophelia is a sinner as his mother, sooner or later. Ophelia is used and manipulated by her father, brother, Hamlet and Claudius. David Leverenz stated that her dramatic function is to be used by others: "Polonius, to gain favor; Laertes, to belittle Hamlets; Claudius, to spy on Hamlet; Hamlet, to express the rage at Gertrude and Hamlet again to express his feigned madness with her as decoy". Being neglected and exploited; Ophelia's madness seems to be inevitable (Leverenz, 1978). While A.C. Bradley considers the overwhelmed Ophelia "beautiful, sweet, lovable, pathetic and dismissible"( qtd in Neely,1991). Other critics interpret her madness as "her liberation from silence, obedience, and constraint or her absolute victimization by patriarchal oppression" (Neely,1991) Though her madness leads to her death, Ophelia's madness can be considered as something inspiring because it makes her break through the boundaries and restrictions of patriarchal authority. It freed her will and tongue. It makes her more than a minor female character to compare Gertrude with or to strengthen the tragedy of Hamlet and makes him feel much guilt. Through her madness she succeed in exposing her inner self as well as her inner conflicts entanglements and paradoxes that she represses and cannot settle down before her madness as well as inflaming Hamlet's lost love to her. Through madness Ophelia escapes from the harsh reality of the harsh world of oppression and cruelty. Through madness Hamlet escapes



being assassinated by Claudius. Ophelia is defeated by her fate and ends up drowning seemingly accidentally. Madness enables her to speak freely but it also leads her to the "female self- driven self- destruction"( Romanska, 2005).

Ophelia is considered frail women according to her father and brother because of her affection for Hamlet as if they don't think that she is worthy of Hamlet's love: Affection, pooh! You speak like a green girl! Unsifted in such perilous circumstances. (1.3, 101-102) Being a female character, her father and brother consider her immature and "green" They use to instruct her what to do giving her no choice except obedience which she usually does for she don't know what to think. That's how she is manipulated by all and that's why Hamlet resent her. Because she obeyed her father and refused Hamlet's affection, despite her love for him. Ophelia's resenting his love makes Hamlet think that she betrays him just like his mother. So Ophelia is labeled unfaithful according to Hamlet's opinion. When Hamlet visits Ophelia's chamber he looks distressed which confuses Ophelia and making her sure that he is mad because of her resenting his love, naturally she is unaware of his meeting with his father's ghost:

Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced, No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled, Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle, Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other, And with a look so piteous in purport As if he had been loosed out of hell To speak of horrors, he comes before me. (2.1.79-85)

Then she describes the way he left her chamber: That done, he lets me go, And, with his head over his shoulder turned, He seemed to find his way without his eyes, For out o' doors he went without their help,

And to the last bended their light on me (2.1.97-101). To Ophelia these lines especially the last two lines show that Hamlet does care for her and confirms her idea that he's mad because of her resenting his affection. That's why when her father asks her if she is the cause of the prince's madness she answered:

My lord, I don't know, But truly I do fear it. (2.1.87-88) Laertes warns Ophelia not to yield when she faces Hamlet's affection: Then if he says he loves you, It fits your wisdom so far to believe it. Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open To his unmastered importunity.

Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister. And keep within the rear of your affection,

Out of the shot and danger of desire (1.3.24-25, 31-35). Polonius asks her if she really believes Hamlet's tenders to which she answers: "I do not know, my lord, what I should think" (1.3, 104).

Laertes' warning echoes Hamlet's accusation to Gertrude of being incapable of controlling her desire for Claudius. Hence, both Gertrude and Ophelia are labeled as frail women, whose feminine emotions are dangerous and unduly. Ophelia chooses Polonius' command over Hamlet's affection. Similarly, Gertrude chooses to surrender to her desire and betrays both Hamlet and his father. Hamlet therefore determines that it's the frailty of womanhood that causes Gertrude and Ophelia to betray him. Consequently, both Gertrude and Ophelia turn from Hamlet's beloved women to those who damage his sanity and affection and are, thus, enemies. Ophelia can't stand the loss of both Hamlet's love who tells her to "get to a nunnery." And her father's murder by Hamlet. Meagan Law (2012) suggests that that her grief poisons her mind resulting in her madness: "Oh, this is the poison of deep grief" (4.5.73)

Ophelia wanders around singing senseless ditties which are a confused jumble about death, dying, lost love and broken promises. This creates concern about her emotional and mental

health. Gertrude and Claudius instruct Horatio to watch her closely. But poor Ophelia can't escape her fate, while singing and leaning on boughs to pick flowers from the banks of a river. One of the boughs breaks and she falls into the water. Ophelia make no attempt to save herself from being dragged into the depths by her clothes which are weighted down by the water. As Gertrude later informs Claudius and Laertes about Ophelia's drowning. It seems as if Ophelia either is hopeless and choses to die, or that she is incapable, in her mental state, to understand the danger and therefore make no attempt to save herself.

But long it could not be till her garments, heavy with their drink, pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay to muddy death" (4.7.179-182) Her madness led to her death Laertes -returns to Denmark to seek revenge for his father's death: "I'll be revenged most thoroughly for my father" (4.5.133-134)

And his sister's madness: "By heaven, thy madness shall be paid by weight till our scale turn the beam" (4.5.157-158) Laertes first blames Claudius for the murder of his father and the madness of his sister, but Claudius mentions that he is not the murderer. Since Claudius considers Hamlet a disease he needs to stop from spreading "Diseases desperate grown by desperate appliance are relieved, or not at all" (4.3.9-11), he directed Laertes's revenge towards Hamlet: "That I am guiltless of your father's death, And a most sensible in grief For it shall as level to your judgement Pierce as day does to your eye" (4.5.154-157) Claudius arranges a duel, using poisoned dagger, between the two young men to let Laertes have his revenge and to get rid of Hamlet at the same time: "And we shall jointly labor with your soul to give it due content" (4.5.208-209)

Hamlet and Laertes will have their duel in which Laertes death but after he wounds Hamlet using the poisoned dagger and telling Hamlet about the poisoned cup before he dies. The Queen Gertrude drinks the poisoned cup and dies. Finally Hamlet has his revenge and killed Claudius with the poisoned dagger and forces him to drink from the same poisoned. That is all resulted from the murder of the two fathers of Hamlet and Ophelia.

### Conclusion

To convey an inner life in a drama is a very challenging task which Shakespeare undertakes successfully by conveying the death of his own son in this play. The impact of losing a son turns to the impact of losing a father that Hamlet and Ophelia have to undergo till death.

### Results

1. The first murder which is committed by Claudius is the main evil that leads to further murders of Polonius, Claudius, Laertes and Hamlet himself.
2. Polonius is killed by Hamlet because Polonius serves as an agent & confidante of Claudius who represents evil. Yet if Polonius deserves to be murdered, Hamlet has no right to murder him.
3. It is the knowledge of Ophelia's father untimely death, the fact that Hamlet has treated her so badly, and the realization that the one she loves is responsible for her father's murder, that drives Ophelia to mental breakdown.
4. Ophelia's reaction to her father's death is insanity. This is ironic because Hamlet tells us that he will pretend to be mad, but Ophelia's madness appears to be genuine.
5. Murders are related to Shakespeare's treatment of the problematic of evil.
6. Instead of being comforted and taken care of, Hamlet and Ophelia's madness bring them more repression and isolation.



7. When their madness exceeds the limits, death is the only solution.

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