



Universality of Shakespeare's tragedy with special reference to Hamlet and King Lear

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Abstract

Shakespeare's plays have lasted a long time because they explore human experiences that are universal and cross boundaries of culture. This is most apparent in King Lear and Hamlet. Both plays have flawed heroes who relate to our own innate fallibility: Lear, blinded by conceit, and Hamlet, struggling with indecision. As these characters struggle with important issues related to life, death, and the nature of justice, the universality becomes increasingly obvious. This existential quest is best illustrated by Hamlet's famous soliloquy, which reflects the human predicament regardless of time. Both plays also explore the intricacies of familial dynamics. The ageless themes of deception, treachery, and the destruction caused by shattered familial ties serve as a constant reminder that, despite their best efforts, families may sometimes serve as fertile ground for bitter disputes. Shakespeare skillfully incorporates the idea of fate—whether it is due to flaws in the self or other forces. The universe portrayed by Hamlet is shaped by the ghost's desire for vengeance, whereas King Lear examines the disastrous outcomes of Lear's first choice. The human effort to reconcile free choice with events outside our control is reflected in this theme, which is why it resonates. Shakespeare's brilliance resides in his ability to masterfully incorporate these common experiences into engrossing stories, which guarantees that Hamlet and King Lear will always have an impact on audiences from all walks of life.

Keyword : Tragedy, Indecision, Redemption, Soliloque, Sufferings, Treachery, Predicament, Flattery, Revenge.

Introduction:

William Shakespeare, who is often considered to be the best playwright in the English language, has explored important issues in tragedy and has had a lasting impact on theater, literature, and the human psyche. Two tragedies in his enormous body of work, "Hamlet" and "King Lear," stand out as colossal accomplishments because they provide insights into the depths of human experience that are timeless in both culture and time. With an emphasis on the ongoing significance of "Hamlet" and "King Lear," the paper lays the groundwork for a thorough analysis of the universality of Shakespearean tragedy. It seeks to understand the eternal truths these works reflect and the ways in which they speak to the universal characteristics of the human predicament by examining their intricacies.

Shakespeare's tragedies are famous for examining basic human emotions, conflicts, and predicaments. "Hamlet," which dates from circa 1600, chronicles the protagonist's grueling quest for vengeance, ethical reflection, and existential turmoil following the death of his father. In contrast, "King Lear," which is thought to have been written in the early 17th century, tells the sad story of a monarch's fall from grace due to arrogance, which ultimately results in betrayal, insanity, and redemption. Even though these plays are set in very different eras, they

have themes in common that go beyond their historical settings and directly address the issues and challenges that have always plagued humanity.

Because "Hamlet" and "King Lear" explore universal themes like the nature of power, the complexity of familial relationships, the frailty of human sanity, and the certainty of death, they have remained popular and relevant for a very long time. Shakespeare's command of language and his deep insight of human psychology enable him to explore these issues in great detail and subtlety, provoking viewers to consider their own experiences and lives. Furthermore, these plays' universality is demonstrated by how well they translate into other cultural contexts and can engage audiences from a range of historical eras and geographic locales.

The examination of timeless ideas and nuanced characters that speak to audiences of all ages and backgrounds is what makes "Hamlet" so universal. The play primarily explores the existential sorrow, moral uncertainty, and emotional turmoil that its title character, Hamlet, goes through. Shakespeare explores the universal human experience of questioning identity, purpose, and mortality through Hamlet's reflective soliloquies and his battle with indecision, treachery, and the need for vengeance. Furthermore, the play's portrayal of power dynamics, familial connections, and political intrigue goes beyond its Elizabethan backdrop to

provide significant insights into the intricacies of human nature and the corrupting effects of ambition and dishonesty.

The thorough examination of issues like familial ties, power dynamics, madness, and the nature of human suffering in "King Lear" demonstrates the play's universality. Shakespeare explores the common experience of aging, frailty, and the fallout from pride and foolishness via the tragic path of its title character. The way that Lear's journey into lunacy and final redemption are shown in the play highlights how resilient humans can be when faced with hardship and how they may develop and learn about themselves. In addition, the subplot featuring Gloucester and his sons and the parallel stories of Lear's daughters Goneril and Regan underscore the ageless themes of loyalty and treachery as well as the frequently tense interactions within families.

The analysis begins with a thorough investigation of Shakespeare's tragedies' universality, concentrating on "Hamlet" and "King Lear." Using an interdisciplinary approach that draws from philosophy, psychology, literature, and cultural studies, the study looks at how these works still have an impact on modern audiences and highlight universal characteristics of human nature. It also explores the profound insights and enduring significance of these tragedies by dissecting the characters, storylines, and literary devices used by Shakespeare. This will help to illuminate the tragedies' universal appeal and their ability to arouse emotion, provoke thought, and upend preconceived notions about life, morality, and the nature of existence.

Literature Review:

Even after hundreds of years, audiences are still enthralled with William Shakespeare's tragedies, which remain a mainstay of theatrical writing. This enduring impact comes from their examination of common human experiences that cut across historical and cultural borders, in addition to their skillful use of language and dramatic structure. With an emphasis on Hamlet and King Lear specifically, this literature review examines the research on the universality of Shakespearean tragedy.

Scholarly attention has been drawn to the ways in which Shakespeare's tragedies address universal concerns that touch people of all backgrounds. In his groundbreaking book *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904), A.C. Bradley highlights the idea of the "flawed hero" (Bradley, 2015). Lear and Hamlet both have weaknesses that ultimately lead to their demise: respectively, indecision and arrogance. Lear divides his kingdom

disastrously because of his conceit and ignorance to the true nature of his daughters. His pride keeps him from appreciating Cordelia's true love, which ultimately causes him to go insane. Hamlet is unable to carry out his desire for vengeance because of his melancholy disposition and lack of decisiveness. Tragic events unfold as a result of his overanalyzing and reflecting, which cause him to be slow to respond to the ghost's call.

This emphasis on human error, according to critics like Harold Bloom in *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, is a crucial component of universality (Bloom, 2019). Viewers recognize themselves in these imperfect characters, realizing that even the best of intentions can have disastrous results. These shortcomings are ubiquitous because they represent basic human frailties. Lear's conceit and gullibility serve as a metaphor for the perils of unbridled ego, a problem that can arise at any time. Anyone who has struggled with making difficult decisions and bearing responsibilities will be able to relate to Hamlet's internal problems with doubt and passivity. Despite their enormous size, these figures serve as a reminder that even the most admirable people can have imperfections that have grave implications.

Fate and free will is another universal theme discussed by Shakespeare's tragedies. The debate between fate and free will is still very relevant to audiences now and goes far beyond Shakespeare's day. Characters in *King Lear* and *Hamlet* struggle with circumstances that seem out of their control. Lear wonders if the sky played a part in his demise, while Hamlet wonders if the ghost's cry for retribution is a predestined course. Both characters do, however, display moments of agency. Lear's initial arrogance initiates the tragedy, and Hamlet postpones his retaliation while debating its morality. This conflict that exists between outside factors and personal decision-making is a battle that all people face. Shakespeare teaches us that although humans are subject to events beyond their control, they nonetheless have some influence over their fates by the decisions they make (Bayley, 2021).

Shakespeare's tragedies point out the faults humans conduct in their decision making. *King Lear* offers an especially depressing perspective. Gloucester, blinded by Cornwall, wonders if the recent eclipses are to blame for his bad luck and proposes that the universe is controlled by predestined astronomical occurrences. It appears as though Lear's daughters have predetermined their brutality, using him as a piece in their game. Evidently, the tragedy begins with Lear's vanity and poor decision-making in the beginning.

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Shakespeare demonstrates that decisions count even in an apparently fatalistic universe. This battle is even more explicitly embodied in Hamlet. The demand for vengeance from the ghost feels like an outside force guiding him along a predestined path. Nevertheless, Hamlet struggles with his conscience, delaying his acts and doubting the act's morality. This internal conflict demonstrates his ability to exercise free will and decide how to react to fate. In the end, this intricate interaction is left for the audience to consider in both plays. Are these characters finally carried away by forces outside of their control, or are they able to resist an apparently predetermined fate? (Kastan, 2003).

Shakespeare's tragedies vividly illustrate how unbridled rage can set off a disastrous series of events (McElroy, 2014). The wrath of the title character in King Lear serves as the impetus for his own demise. Lear banishes his obedient daughter Cordelia out of pride and a glut of flattery, preferring the cunning Goneril and Regan. This rash, furious deed sets off a series of events that deprive Lear of his authority and drive him insane. Lear highlights the destructive repercussions of despair on oneself and everyone around him by releasing torrents of anger upon the world as he sinks into despair (Carroll, 2012).

Another excellent illustration of wrath's destructive effect is Hamlet's internal battle with rage. After his father is killed, Hamlet is consumed with grief and rage and becomes obsessed with getting revenge. His judgment is impaired by this overwhelming wrath, which results in a series of needless murders and reckless decisions. Ophelia, unable to handle the emotional pressure, goes insane and kills her own life, while Polonius, caught in the crossfire of Hamlet's rage, meets a tragic end. Hamlet's incapacity to restrain his fury finally results in the destruction of not only his adversaries but also the defenseless individuals he encounters (Christofides, 2008).

The way that anger may cloud our judgment and send us on a destructive path is what makes this issue universal. Shakespeare serves as a reminder that although rage is a normal human emotion, letting it control our behavior can have disastrous results. Hamlet's fury isolates him and feeds a cycle of violence, much as Lear's initial outburst starts a sad series of events. These tragedies serve as a sobering reminder to adopt healthy strategies for managing our anger and keep it from taking control of us.

Shakespeare's tragedies dive deeply into the complexity of family relationships, highlighting the perils of treachery and deceit as well as the possibilities for love and fidelity (Bratchell, 2019).

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A particularly depressing depiction of dysfunctional family dynamics can be found in King Lear. Goneril and Regan, Lear's cunning daughters, deprive him of authority and treat him cruelly as a result of Lear's early faith in them. His sincere loving daughter Cordelia faces rejection because of her candor. This drama highlights the corrosive nature of family manipulation and the disastrous effects of mistaken trust. Audiences that see the value of strong family ties can relate to the breakdown of the natural order, as children turn against their parents.

The intricacies of family are further examined in Hamlet. Despite his mother's marriage to Claudius, the man who killed his father, Hamlet struggles with her betrayal. Their tense relationship serves as a stark reminder of the emotional upheaval kids can encounter when their parents make decisions that go against their moral compass. The piece also examines the relationship between siblings. Laertes, who avenges the death of his father Polonius at the hands of Hamlet, illustrates the deadly combination that can result from family loyalty and violence (Akhtar, 2020). Shakespeare teaches us—a reality that has resonance throughout history and across cultures—that the bonds that unite us may also be the source of great sorrow and suffering through these dysfunctional family dynamics.

Shakespeare's tragedies show us the terrible results of taking appearances to be true. The elderly king's initial assessment in King Lear is tainted by his daughters' obvious fondness. In order to secure their inheritance, Goneril and Regan manipulate Lear's emotions by showering him with compliments. Only when they achieve power do their true colors show, depriving Lear of his honor and exposing their vicious desire. Lear's view of his daughters is destroyed by this heinous treachery, underscoring the perils of believing empty words (St. Hilaire, 2016). In Hamlet, Claudius's apparent sincere sorrow over his brother's passing conceals his true identity as the killer. The distinction between sane and insanity is further blurred by Hamlet's pretended madness, which creates a universe in which genuine motives are concealed and appearances are deceiving. Shakespeare makes this notion universally apparent through the terrible demise of these characters. His plays serve as a warning, asking us to look above the surface and critically assess the motivations of those around us because we are all prone to being duped by appearances.

Shakespeare's tragedies are always tinged with death, forcing the characters to face their own mortality and the transience of existence. Death is a recurring theme in Hamlet, from Ophelia's terrible end to the spirit of King Hamlet seeking retribution.

In his famous "To Be or Not to Be" soliloquy, Hamlet muses over the meaning of life and death and wrestles with the uncertainty that lies beyond. Similar to this, King Lear is rife with death, illustrating the terrible consequences of violence and treachery. The passing of Cordelia and his faithful Fool drives Lear into madness, emphasizing the transience of authority and the commonality of human sorrow in the face of death. Shakespeare makes the point that death is an inescapable aspect of life throughout these plays, which encourages viewers to reflect on the meaning of life and the legacy one leaves behind (Basha, 2017).

Shakespeare's tragedies delve into universal human experiences that transcend their Elizabethan roots. Audience and readers across themes in Hamlet and King Lear that cut across generations and cultures. The plays address the deadly force of retribution, the intricate interaction between fate and free will, and the disastrous results of unbridled ambition and wrath. Shakespeare explores the intricacies of familial bonds, highlighting the perils of treachery and dishonesty in addition to the possibilities for love and loyalty. He warns us not to be deceived by looks because characters who take on false emotions from their outer manifestations end up tragically. Ultimately, the constant presence of death in these plays compels both audiences and characters to acknowledge their own mortality and the transience of existence. Shakespeare's tragedies ensure their enduring relevance for audiences today and well into the future by delving into these eternal themes and providing significant insights into the human condition.

Conclusion:

Shakespeare's tragedies, such as "Hamlet" and "King Lear," are universal and serve as prime examples of the literature's persistent ability to cut beyond borders of time, culture, and place. These plays engage audiences of all ages with their study of timeless themes like power, treachery, lunacy, and mortality. They also encourage contemplation on the complexity of the human condition. Shakespeare's "Hamlet" and "King Lear" remain relevant and powerful works of art, conveying fundamental truths about life, morality, and the nature of existence thanks to his brilliant storytelling, rich characterizations, and profound insights into the depths of human experience. These tragedies connect us to the past while lighting the route forward with their timeless wisdom and enduring relevance. They serve as heartbreaking reminders of our shared humanity as we continue to wrestle with the same existential issues and moral dilemmas that Shakespeare's characters confront.

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