

HAMLET'S CHARACTER TRAITS

AS SEEN IN

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S HAMLET

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Hamlet is a tragedy written by William Shakespeare. Hamlet is the protagonist of the play and is portrayed as a very emotional soul, a daring, brave character who has a bad and violent temper.

Hamlet is a very emotional young man. As we all know, his father's death was a shock for him and he could not get over it. Claudius mentions that Hamlet was taking the mourning of his father's death to extremes:

To give these mourning duties to your father;
But you must know, your father lost a father;
That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound
In filial obligation for some term
To do obsequious sorrow. 1

The King is telling Hamlet that death is only natural and that Hamlet's father lost his father too. He is informing Hamlet that he is mourning too much for his deceased father and he should try to get over it. Another example of Hamlet's emotions getting the better of him can be seen when he is reminiscing his father's death. Hamlet says, "...How stand I then,/That have father killed, a mother stained,...2". He is asking himself what kind of a person he is if he can allow his father to be murdered and his mother to be married so soon after his father's death to his uncle. This shows us that he is pitying himself and is putting himself down. Yet another example of his emotions running wild are seen in his first soliloquy:

...She married. O, most wicked speed, to post

with such dexterity to incestuous sheets!

It is not, nor it cannot come to good.

But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue! 3

He is telling us that his mother has married right away and did not mourn for his father's death. He tells us that the marriage is not good and nor can this marriage between Claudius and Getrude come to any good. He wants to express his true feelings to his mother, but since it will hurt her, he must be silent for the time being. This shows us that he has a great and deep love for his mother. He will not say or do anything to hurt her, even though what she is doing is wrong.

Hamlet is also a brave and daring character. There are several examples of his fearless attitude, but I will only discuss the two that I feel are the most important. The first example occurs when the ghost visits Hamlet, Horatio and Marcellus. Here Hamlet is determined to meet the ghost:

If it assume my noble father's person,
I'll speak to it, though hell itself should gape
And bid me hold my peace. 4

Hamlet wants to speak to the ghost, even though it might be a demon instead of his father's spirit. Another example of his bravery is portrayed when he actually sees the ghost:

HAM. It will not speak. Then I will follow it.

HOR. Do not, my lord!

HAM. Why, what should be the fear? 5

Hamlet is not afraid to follow the ghost and speak with it, despite the fact that Horatio is telling him not to go. He asks Horatio why he is stopping him and what is there to be afraid of. Another significant incident that brings out

Hamlet's daring character is when he arranges for the players to perform "The Murder of Gonzago" to find out whether or not the King is guilty of his father's murder. Hamlet's plan is, "...The play's the thing/Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King. 6" He decides to use the play to test the King's conscience and if the King seems nervous or behaves strangely he will know his course from there.(To do what the apparition told him. Get revenge.)

Hamlet also has a bad and violent temper. This is expressed when the meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia goes sour:

...You jig, you amble, and you lisp; you nickname
God's creatures and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on't! it hath made me mad. 7

Here he is upset with Ophelia and insults her and tells her that she names things according to her own fancy and then acts as if her own wilfulness is ignorance. He says that he has had enough of it and this has made him mad. Another scene where he expresses his anger is immediately after killing Polonius and shouts at his mother:

Here is your husband, like a mildewed ear
Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?
Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,
And batten on this moor? Ha! have you eyes? 8

He is telling Gertrude that her new husband is nothing like Hamlet's

biological father. How could she leave him after his death and marry

Claudius. Can't she see what she is doing?

These are three of Hamlet's character traits as seen in Shakespeare's Hamlet. I feel that all these character traits are important, but the most significant one is the portrayal of his brave and daring character. I feel that this character trait is the most significant because if Hamlet had not met with the ghost or set up "The Mousetrap", the play would not have been where it is now since he wouldn't know what happened to his father.

REFERENCES

Shakespeare, William. Hamlet. U.S.A.: Washington Square Press, 1958.

NOTES

1William Shakespeare, Hamlet (U.S.A.: Washington Square Press, 1958), I.ii.94-98.

2ibid., IV.iv.58-59.

3ibid., I.ii.162-165.

4ibid., I.ii.267-269.

5ibid., I.iv.69-71.

6ibid., II.ii.612-613.

7ibid., III.i.154-156.

8ibid., III.iv.74-77.