



An Analysis of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* Through Terry Eagleton's Conception of Tragedy

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Abstract— This paper offers a comprehensive analysis of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, employing Terry Eagleton's conception of tragedy from his book *Sweet Violence*. It examines how the play achieves excellence through wisdom, intellectual depth, and emotional maturity, exposing the sublimity of human effort in creating an enduring experience for the audience. The paper delves into the elements of sacrifice, the dilemma of the tragic hero, and the concept of tragedy as a genre with emotional impact, showcasing the influential nature of the play. Furthermore, it explores the intertwining of external accidents with the hero's struggles and the balance of universality and particularity in evoking sympathy and engagement within the audience. Additionally, it discusses Eagleton's notion of tragedy as a means to offer political hope and belief in justice and redemption, even in the darkest of times. The analysis examines *Hamlet*'s fit in both traditionalist and democratic perspectives and finally delves into the Greek concept of the *pharmakos*, highlighting why *Hamlet*'s suffering leads to emotional cleansing or *katharsis* for the audience.



Keywords— *Hamlet*, Eagleton, Tragedy, Tragic Hero, *Pharmakos*

“War, revolution, poverty, hunger; men reduced to objects and killed from lists; persecution and torture; the many kinds of contemporary martyrdom; however close and insistent the facts, we are not to be moved, in a context of tragedy. Tragedy, we know, is about something else.”

(Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy*)

Tragedy Through Universality and Particularity

Known to be one of the greatest tragedies ever written by the Bard-of-Avon, William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* has stood the test of time and presented itself as the cornerstone of modern tragedies and literature. Ranging from its modern adaptations being staged in the most novel settings such as Caridad Svich's version which took place in a swimming pool in Brooklyn, to its utilization into the sciences of human behaviour and psyche, as seen in its scope of rendering human suffering, the play has been a vastly influential piece of English literature. The elements of the tragic that allowed it to have encompassed human mortality for over four centuries are as complex as its rendition.

Though critics like TS Eliot have taken jabs at the play, referring to it as an “artistic failure,” it is more often than not a misinterpretation or perhaps a misreading of the play. Terry Eagleton defends the idea of ‘tragedy’ as one that is anything but merely such, in contrast to Eliot who viewed the tragedy of *Hamlet* as a product of sheer accidents in the plot. According to Eliot, the play became secondary to its protagonist and the problematizing features of it, as a result, were mere elements of accidents. His idea that the character of Prince Hamlet was appealing to a “creative-minded individual” such that they saw themselves in his shoes was one that Eagleton does not necessarily agree with. Instead, in defence of tragedies, such as one like *Hamlet*, Eagleton reiterates its roots in specificity— the particularity of people and their suffering— which attain universality of meaning through their characters that are relatable and ordinary in their ordeals like any of us (*Sweet Violence* xvi). In such a sense, Prince Hamlet who embodies the tragic hero in his specificity and the “world-historical forces” in his universality becomes the perfect agent in creating a tragedy.

The debate over the nature of tragedies being controlled by predetermination or by accident which rises out of Eliot's critique of *Hamlet* is an important one and is discussed thoroughly by Eagleton in *Sweet Violence* (2002). He puts forth the idea of the 'classic' or the 'traditional' tragedies in comparison with those that Hegel refers to as 'modern.' Eagleton goes on to elaborate that the Hegelian viewpoint depends heavily on the idea of 'accident' as a catalyst of dramatic actions pertaining to tragedies yet the traditional perspective takes on the approach that relies on fate or 'predetermination' (SV 43). In the context of *Hamlet* which falls into the category of modern tragedies, the idea of "extraneous accidents" is what renders it a success in the genre. Unlike classical plays where the 'tragic' was immanent, *Hamlet* becomes the struggle of a man's particularity with the universal— as Kant would call it "overriding one's individual desires in the name of moral duty" (44). Thus, when Polonius points toward Hamlet's condition, he exclaims "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't" (*Hamlet* II.ii)— an expression indicating the tragic struggle of renouncing one's sense of specificity for something universal yet evidently methodical. In such a sense, Eagleton brings forth a vital element of modern tragedies— the idea of sacrifice. With the great power of being the prince of Denmark, a son to one of the most capable rulers, and a devout Christian for his people, Hamlet endured the powerlessness of being incapacitated in his personal life.

This is in contrast to characters who let go of the universal for the particular— such characters, unlike Hamlet, are not tragic heroes as they lack a higher ethical justification (SV 44). Eagleton demonstrates the argument by presenting Kierkegaard's story of Abraham, one of particularity, and personal motivation, that lacked any ethics pertaining to society. By allowing oneself to be enamoured by anything other than the universal or ethical obligation, the character loses its lustre of becoming a tragic hero. In the case of Hamlet, he struggles against the divine laws of his faith ('universal') to not succumb to his will to commit suicide ('particular') after having endured a series of painful revelations in the course of the play— such a hero subordinates himself and his desires for the "well-being of the whole" (SV 44). According to Eagleton, this is one of the significant elements that demonstrate the nature of tragedy, and it allows *Hamlet* to be revered as one of the best-written tragedies. Hence, the sacrificial attitude found in the hero's persistence and struggle against personal motivations for ones that are socially, morally and ethically justified are what elevate characters such as Hamlet to tragic heroes.

Even though Hamlet proves itself to be a great tragedy in the above-mentioned sense of Hegel, Eagleton

goes on to add nuances to the proposition. In his introduction to *Sweet Violence*, he delves into the idea of the specificity of tragedies— the particular nature of experiences such as the typical nature of Prince Hamlet finding himself in a series of events leading him to lament in his soliloquies:

O that this too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God!
O God!
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
(*Hamlet* I.ii)

The particularity of people and their problems such as the precise dilemma of Hamlet seeking revenge or finding a personal escape through suicide are not comparable in their complete essence. However, the universality of his experiences in the form of 'suffering' is rooted in all communities and creates a "communality of meaning" (SV xvi). The elements of having been negated, hurt, powerless, injured, or divided are what bind Hamlet's sufferings with a consensus from the rest of us and produce a tragedy. In such a sense, Eagleton reiterates the common currency of 'suffering' across all phenomena that ought to pass as tragedies; the resignation and fatality associated with it become the dramatizing agents of the tragic play and produce ubiquitous responses across all audiences.

The idea that Eagleton presents tragedies being created through external events referred to as 'accidents' is a popular one. Despite his insistence that most modern tragedies like *Hamlet* are built upon the outcomes of extraneous variables, Eagleton does not deny the touch of fate in them. In agreement with Žižek, he does accord some credit to the logic of Fate yet steers clear from any reliance on it as the sole paddle to the boat of tragedy (SV 126). In such a context, the downfall of tragic heroes such as Hamlet is based on their victimization or perhaps a sense of deserving what comes to them. Thus, when we view Hamlet as a man suffering from the pains of witnessing his mother engaging "in th' incestuous pleasure of [Claudius'] bed" (II.iv), he becomes the tragic victim of his circumstances allowing the audience to sympathise with him in his weakest moments. However, Hamlet remains aware of the tussle between his condition propagated through external circumstances with that of fate: "Our wills and fates do so contrary run / That our devices still are overthrown. / Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own" (III.ii). Despite the somewhat predetermined lives, Hamlet does take into hand the agency to work towards his goals and kill

Claudius. Thus, when he pledges “By heaven, I’ll make a ghost of him that lets me” (I.iv) he not only takes fate into his hands but also proves what Eagleton attempts to say—though fate exists in some form, a tragedy renders itself only when there is a conscious struggle, a fighting spirit, and the power of the human spirit which can only be shown in taking reins over one’s own life. It is only when an extraneous variable such as misfortune acts that Hamlet’s persona can become the catalyst of tragedy; the existence of fate or destiny solely would not enamour any realization of an affinity with the hero on behalf of the audience.

Tragedy Through Its Effects

The question that Eagleton poses often in his book is whether tragedies are a separate genre based on their impact on their viewers or if there exists a greater emphasis on factors pertaining to its contents which could justify its existence as a category set apart from any other in drama. To delve into the matter, it becomes necessary to examine how true tragedies are those which can indeed be equated with excellence (Koelb 72). These would include dramas that are classified as ‘fine writing,’ rich in the way they present wisdom, and include an intellectual depth as well as a maturity to understand. Though Eliot’s idea of tragedies was mocked by Eagleton as “tragic elitism” (SV 48), the impact of such plays is somewhat dependent on the audience’s reception. Unlike Eliot who saw the audience as ranging from lower to higher “*cognoscenti*,” Eagleton talks about it in general terms of emotional reception without bringing a class divide of intellect into it. Nevertheless, he saw it as a recurring practice for tragedies to be closer to softened blows instead of a blatant jab—in simpler words, the plays were usually shaped keeping the assumption that the public would not consume such woeful tales without hints of humour or “callous comic” elements (SV 23). This was perhaps why there were always comic reliefs in most plays by Shakespeare—especially using the characters of court jesters or ‘fools’ as in *King Lear* or *Othello*. However, *Hamlet* remains an intense and sombre tragedy with only a few moments of puns to spare the audience any comic relief. In such a sense, the tragedy of *Hamlet* attains its status through the pure macabre and depressing exchange of jokes that keep the dramatic mood of the play in place. It is indeed the wisdom in Hamlet’s self-reflection, the depth of his dilemma, and his maturity in fearing the Christian laws of the divine that enhance the drama into a tragedy par excellence. The sardonic humour used in the Gravedigger’s scene in Act V, Scene I was perhaps the only dedicated comic relief in the play and yet had the most macabre sense of poking fun at the idea of death. When the first Gravedigger poses a riddle “What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?” and the other responds with “The gallows-maker, for that frame

outlives a thousand tenants,” it becomes apparent that even the most tension-easing moments of comedy were tragic in nature. This was why Coleridge commented on the use of impeccable comic scenes in such tragedies: “Shakespeare imitates life, mingled as we find it with joy and sorrow” (*Shakespeare’s Criticism* 200). His emphasis on the reinforcing potential through ironic contrast was what helped plays like *Hamlet* achieve the status of a well-written tragedy.

Drawing from the idea of Greek tragedies, the death of a tragic hero was a moment when the chorus danced and celebrated before leaving the stage. Eagleton views it as a significant part of the tragedy for he quotes Yeats claiming “In all the great tragedies, tragedy is a joy to the man who dies” thereby indicating why the Greek chorus would present the moment as one where it was necessary to emphasise the ecstasy of Aristotelian *katharsis* instead of painful agony (SV 24). For such an ecstatic experience, it becomes important for the play to justify the death of the tragic hero or else the emotional turmoil within the viewers might never dissipate. Taking the case of *Hamlet*, the death of Prince Hamlet had to be justified and Shakespeare was successful in doing so. The element of tragedy took place because his death was not just seemingly necessary for closure but also justified in its essence. Dorothea Krook claimed that in order for it to be called a tragedy, the play must not be “lacking a sense of redemption” (116) and Hamlet precisely did not fail in such a feat. He not only redeemed his father, the King, as a loyal son but also redeemed himself as a man of honour for his people. This was why raiders can observe a zeal of redemption taking over him when he says: “Haste me to know’t, that I, with wings as swift / As meditation or the thoughts of love, / May sweep to my revenge” (I.v).

In addition to him being able to avenge his father for moral and ethical violations, his expiation for committing the murders, whether indirectly, of most characters in the play, it was inevitable for him to escape death himself. Bowers warns about isolating characters in order to justify their tragic ends, for it ought to have a cause-effect relationship with the events and people in the tragedy (215). Thus, when Hamlet justified the murder of his uncle due to moral and ethical duties which he owed to the King, it became a cause for a further death—the murder of the ‘self.’ Eagleton claimed that as passive suffering was not what constituted a real tragedy, it was of ultimate importance that the death of the tragic hero, or Hamlet, was central to the plot and made dramatically significant while being saved for the end.

The impact of such a death was of further relevance to Eagleton who saw it as a means synonymous with Aristotle’s *katharsis*—the sense of being liberated

from burdensome feelings and finally being restored to normalcy after an emotionally wrecking experience. It stands for an ecstasy associated with the purging of one's feelings rendering a delicate balance of distress and empathy which sets it off. In Nietzsche's terms, it would be associated with a glimpse into the Dionysian and coming back to the state of the Apollonian—the pain associated with Hamlet's character when he loses his father to murder, his mother to Claudius' manipulation, his lover to suicide, and his sanity to a depressive-manic state stirs the audience's emotions; the redemption through Claudius' death and his own brings the audience back to emotional normalcy. The idea that there exists a paradox where tragedy would bring about satisfaction much like Nietzsche's Dionysian sense is proof that it is not the form that is tragic but its content. Thus, it is tragic for Hamlet to lose Ophelia but it is not melancholic simply because it ought to be a tragedy. Eagleton calls it a “negative utopia” where Hamlet's disintegration integrates our emotionality as the observers. It is a brief glimpse into one's primordial faculties to gauge ecstatic emotions, and in the process relish the “indestructibility and eternity of this joy” (Nietzsche 129). Hence, in Hamlet's despair, the audience finds its own outlet for satisfying such emotions rendering the play a tragedy.

Such an association of complex emotions with the plot of the play brings forth the significance of the “sublimity of human effort” (Raphael 27). There only exists the essence of tragedy because of the human value in dealing with the woes of life—something that Hamlet would refer to in his soliloquy as “The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” that “makes calamity of so long life” and by “opposing, end them” from existing (III.i). It is in his life to bear losses and witness the sacrifice of his sanity to bring an end to the bitterness of his life's circumstances. Thus, when Eagleton claims that tragedy is “released in the act of destruction” where the audience swivels in the pain of the protagonist, the sense of ruination associated with the human calamity makes the suffering of the tragic hero an ecstatic experience. In the madness of Hamlet lies the calm of the audience—heightened, exhilarating emotions evoking the essence of tragedy through its pained protagonist. Thus, when Claudius goes on to say “Madness in great ones must not unwatched go” (III.i) he not just refers to Hamlet's madness or his own but also to how the audience ought to respond to the suffering in the play.

Furthering his ideas about the implications of a play that render it a tragedy, Eagleton agrees with Hölderlin's claim that God is presented in a human incarnation and it is only through its annihilation that the tragic effect can take hold of the audience (SV 28). The incarnation is none other than that of the tragic hero himself

with his suffering steering the plot towards his death. Through such a principle, tragic heroes like Hamlet attain the stature of being suffering yet glamorous beings. The ecstatic energy around such characters like Hamlet elevated them to a higher pedestal—one where their death was not their defeat but their triumph in life. It comes together to make sense when even in his death Hamlet utters to Horatio, “Report me and my cause aright / To the unsatisfied” (V.ii). The ‘unsatisfied’ in such a sense does not merely pertain to Fortinbras or the people of Denmark who ought to know of him as an avenger to the King but also to the audience who will now become ‘satisfied’ with his cathartic death. Even at the end of his life, which should appear as one's most painful moment in life, he is regarded as a triumphant hero salvaging the audience's emotions.

As seen with Eagleton's observations, the belief that the tragic hero is a reincarnation created to be destroyed, the audience is invested in the resolution of the play, not necessarily the solution. In *Hamlet*, no apparent answer existed that could soothe the pain of losing both the parents—the King and the Queen—to Claudius' ploys. The only answer, if it existed at all, was weeding out the root cause by murdering the uncle. Such a crime was justified in the case of Hamlet for it was his princely duty to avenge his father, the King of Denmark, whom he described vividly:

See, what a grace was seated on this brow;
Hyperion's curls; the front of Jove himself;
An eye like Mars, to threaten and command;
A station like the herald Mercury
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill.
A combination and a form indeed
Where every god did seem to set his seal
To give the world assurance of a man. (*Hamlet*
III.iv)

From what Hamlet establishes the King as it becomes apparent that he was a mighty ruler and ought to be avenged for his murder. In order to find justice for such a heinous crime, Hamlet has no other option but to kill Claudius and reveal the truth to the world. Nevertheless, such a story is not uncommon which is why Eagleton insists that tragedies are those that exhibit “a political hope” where the audience is impacted to continue their lives with the belief that even in the “darkest historical moments” there ought to be faith (SV 27). This not only creates a spotlight for the tragic hero to be revered as an individual but also the universal, much like Hegel's perspective.

The Dilemma of a Tragic Hero

Terry Eagleton discussed the idea of tragedy and what makes it so using the idea of the tragic hero, but what precisely is a tragic hero? He claims that there exist two perspectives in this regard— the traditionalist and the democratic. Interestingly for us, Hamlet fits well in both of them!

Starting from the traditionalist approach of classifying what makes a tragedy, Eagleton chooses Dorothea Krooks as an apt representative. She describes tragic heroes requiring to have an undying spirit to go on despite all odds, including their conditions as anything but pitiable and passive (SV 76). This would mean that the hero ought to have a sense of agency which would make the plot even more melancholic and hence, tragic. Looking at Hamlet in such a sense we find him at various stages demonstrating the existence of this agency even if he procrastinated in actually using it. For instance, when he found Claudius praying to be ridden of his sins, he saw the opportunity to slay him for he was unguarded and alone: "Now might I do it pat. Now he is a-praying. / And now I'll do't" (III.iii). This was a demonstration of the control he had over the situation which he, nevertheless, did not exercise till the very end of the play.

Hamlet also demonstrates his agency and the inherent will to not follow established societal rules at various points. Such emotions are shared by the audience and would briefly give us a glimpse into the Dionysian element of Nietzsche. Hamlet endeavours to get away from the definitions that society offers. He does not permit Polonius to affirm dominance or to characterize him. He cuts for himself each time: by sidestepping the proper definitions society lays on him, by slicing through expected conduct and moving toward Ophelia straightforwardly after the shock of the Ghost's declaration— he acts counter to the examples endorsed for him: his credible 'social' self, his feeling of himself and the manner in which others see him seem to be at odds.

Despite this, society could be seen forcing control on Hamlet's genuineness, requesting that, for instance, he give up his love for Ophelia, yet he does not succumb to it. For the audience, such a deed shows him relishing the breaking away from the imposition of any sort of definition— such behaviour is socially untrustworthy yet is an inherent desire shared by all of us akin. Thus, he exercises his agency actively, leading him to become a tragic hero. Even in the sense of procrastinating, Hamlet seems to practise his agency of neglecting social responsibilities temporarily. It becomes tragic for the audience— this is a shocking position since, despite the fact that extraneous circumstances attempt to hinder his path, it

becomes the only accessible way for a man to affirm himself as genuine, to typify and realize himself in the world.

Another element that Krooks maintained according to Eagleton was that of the status of the tragic hero. He should be an individual the audience could relate with such that he became a representation of each one of them yet at the same time was slightly higher in stature. This was, however, countered by the democratized point-of-view where Eagleton argues the contemporary sense of tragedies lies. He maintains that the assumption that "tragedy is one thing and ordinary life another is unwarranted" (SV 93). In this sense, each one of us has the potential to be a tragic hero or what he refers to as 'tragic figures' for the sake of democratizing it. The fates of characters like Hamlet become as important as any of ours— this would mean that Krook's argument of tragedies having a specially endowed tragic hero becomes meaningless. Eagleton supports this notion and goes on to comment on the former perspective as one that is 'elitist.' Going back to the beginning of this analysis, the quote of Raymond Williams must make sense now— "Tragedy is about something else": it is truly about the "mandarin disdain for modernity and the common life" (SV 16). Hamlet, given his unabashed unapologetic sense of being a human, allows him to fall into the idea of democratized tragic characters as well. He is caught in the most awful moral tie: being sickened by what Gertrude has done, but unable to deny that she is his mother after all and that he's obliged to adore her— "No, by the rood, not so: / You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife; / And— would it were not so!—you are my mother" (III.iv). Moreover, he shares the human tenet of being one's own critic. Not only does he have bouts of hatred for himself for being unable to do as others can, but he also shares the emotions of shame and guilt associated with his flaws, making him relatable to the audience. He overthinks like any of us which was evident in his soliloquy "to be or not to be" (III.i) and is sometimes reckless, defiant, and anxious like how any human would be if they were in his shoes.

The Pharmakos and Tragedy

Terry Eagleton goes on to criticise the ideas of the Left about the tragedy in his last chapter titled '*Thomas Mann's Hedgehog*.' He comments that these Radicals view tragedy as one associating sacrifice through mythic, cultic, and religious notions. This would entail the idea that "suffering is an energizing, revitalizing part of human existence" and what is created by the Gods ought to go back to them. For this, a sacrifice is deemed necessary which would be "dismembered to be renewed" (SV 275). Thus, in a sense hinting at how we are earthly beings and will go back to being dirt, precisely conveyed in Adam's words: "For dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (*Genesis* 3:19).

Eagleton takes an intellectually stimulated stance, for he claims that sacrifice is a necessary aspect of tragedies yet it has to do with the realm of ethics, not the cult. It is important when something has to be destroyed or diminished for it to be remade with the added sense of replacing the idea of 'divinity' with 'community.' Hence, when we see Hamlet with the Gravediggers in Act V, Scene I, he seems to be pursuing the same idea claiming that one "returneth to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make / loam" (9) when he picks up Yorick's skull and is amused by the cycle to diminishing in order to be renewed as he saw in the case of Alexander The Great.

Eagleton argues that sacrifice has remained an integral part of community life, not merely religious. He quotes the example of 'Yahweh' from the Old Testament who struggled to convince people he was the god of freedom and justice (SV 277) and that cults were perhaps secondary to such a liberation. This is also supported by the argument that there has been no proof to claim that Greek dramas were derived from religion. Moreover, Yahweh identified with the '*anawim*' or the 'dispossessed' as mentioned in the Hebrew scriptures— quite literally the '*pharmakos*' or the 'scapegoats' which fit perfectly in the etymology of the word 'tragedy.' The *pharmakoi* were chosen from the "lowest of the low" and were the sacrificial scapegoat loaded with the sins, guilt, and burden of the entire community. In order to create such a powerful symbol of sacrifice, they were paraded and beaten in the streets to rid them of any identity. In a sense, there was no association between the *pharmakoi* and humanness for, now it became a mode of cleansing the community of all its sins— in a sense mimicking the idea of the tragedy itself.

The question now arises, how can Hamlet be viewed as a tragedy under the same lens? Eagleton paves the way for interpreting the play in two ways— one where he suggests a literal representation of a scapegoat in the drama and the other where the impact of the play is equated with the impact of a *pharmakos*. Taking the former way of interpreting, the character of Hamlet becomes the scapegoat of his story— he carries the guilt and burden of his community that has sinned by murdering, engaging in incest, and has been manipulative and deceitful. These sins are burdened upon Hamlet who is found to be tortured in the progression of the play by his intrusive thoughts and circumstances so much that when Claudius commands "Madness in great ones must not unwatch'd go" (III.i) it becomes a moment of spectacle to watch Hamlet spiral down to a space where he loses his sense of self. As Adrian Poole suggests, Hamlet as a scapegoat is a "double subject" (106) for he exists between the contradictions of divine law and personal law. He is characterized in a manner where he is different enough for the audience to loathe him given his

hamartia of procrastination and indecisiveness but is also at the same time a mirror-image of each one of us stuck between the nuances of morality. He is a living contradiction of the law and its transgressor where he ought to avenge his father's murder but become a murderer in doing so. Thus, as Eagleton suggests, the true redemption of such a *pharmakos* lies in becoming an "obscene disfigurement of humanity" whose justice lies in finally offering his tortured body and soul at the end of the play. He is the perfect symbol of sacrifice essential for a tragedy as he dwindles between the space of civility where he is often tortured into turning away from suicide, but also a space of turbulent powers that force him to reconsider this choice. His soliloquy of "to be or not to be" is his "death-in-life" having suffered the pains of carrying the secret of murder and incest taking place in his community so much so that his final passing becomes his "life-in-death" for having cleansed the community of such crimes.

Taking the latter perspective forward, the idea of the *pharmakos* taking the burden of sins of a community and dying with it produces a tragic effect. Eagleton demonstrates this using the idea that much like how the guilt-containing scapegoat would become the abject and further the unburdening of its people, similarly, a tragedy would have an impact on its audience similar to Aristotle's catharsis— and emotional cleanse, unburdening and riddance from negative emotions. While Eagleton compares the fear of such a *pharmakos* with the consolidation of the ideology that everything is well except for *one* problem that ought to be removed to renew the status quo of the community, on the other hand, pitying such a creature would mean establishing an identity with it where the guilt it carries becomes horrifying.

In the case of *Hamlet*, such an effect is achieved by allowing Prince Hamlet to be tortured throughout the play, allowing the audience to experience pity for him. Not only is the torture evident in his psychological deterioration where he suffers the "whips and scorns of time" (III.i) but also his emotional breakdown when he begs his mother to not sleep with his uncle having the consciousness that "Thus bad begins and worse remains behind" (III.iv). In pitying him, the audience sympathizes with his sufferings by identifying with them. Not only does it create horror in their minds but also demonstrates the "social order whose failure it signifies" (SV 279). In addition, the feeling of fear that emanates from establishing such a relationship helps each receiver to strengthen the desire to purge their feelings. This would imply that while pity would cause an upsurge in negative emotions, similar to how the *pharmakos* is loaded with the guilt of the community, fear becomes the trigger to release these emotions thereby depicting a cleansing effect.

In this process, Hamlet and his mortal being become the sacrifice for his community to be purged of their sins.

In conclusion, it can be claimed that the idea of sacrifice becomes significant in most, if not all, tragedies. As Walter Benjamin claims, "Sacrifice is an act of liberation: through the death of the hero, the community comes to consciousness of its subjection" (107). It is through such an act it becomes apparent that tragedy is not an idea limited to the great thinkers from Greece or the West but an experience that takes meaning when a community believes in it. As tragedy in itself symbolizes the macabre facet of death and pain, it automatically also contains the multitude of the release of these ideas. In doing so, tragedies such as Shakespeare's *Hamlet* become one of the imminent pieces of literature that have guided theories of tragedy for centuries to come.

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