

# NATURE AND FUNCTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAY HAMLET

MOHAMMAD IDREES

*Department of English NWFP Agricultural University Peshawar (NWFP) Pakistan*

## ABSTRACT

Consciousness appears to determine the tragic nature of life in the tragedy of Hamlet. Consciousness takes the moral law for granted. The duty of revenge removes from his consciousness any question of dilemma of soul-searching. It is consciousness that makes Prince Hamlet not a coward but a mind so torn and dragged between betrayal of action and the failure of non-action. Consciousness becomes a point of departure from which the tragedy stems. In pursuing the duty laid down upon him by his father's ghost, Hamlet brings to light a state of disease, which affects the entire field presented to his consciousness. Life becomes impossible for him, but consciousness remains. His consciousness can dare do anything, feel anything, and think anything. Hamlet is fully at home in the situation, which the tragedy has wished upon him. Consciousness becomes fully aware of everything that it has made for itself, everything that it has stored for it. Consciousness in Hamlet develops as an aspect of conspiracy and concealment. The amazement, in which Hamlet's consciousness begins, is to find his repulsive uncle is really a villain. Consciousness accepts the necessity for the task

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most distinguishing features of this play is the consciousness. For Hamlet the startling and tragic recognition is the greatest horror that life can hold. The recognition is a phase in the dual between Claudius and Hamlet. The recognition becomes a point of departure from which the tragedy stems. Hamlet's derangement in his words and conduct throughout the rest of the play does not appear to be exaggerated but is a disguise assumed through necessity rather than as an effect of pure calculation. The necessity springs from the shock induced by the realization of the true facts, after which Hamlet can never again be confident of behaving rationally—one cannot expect a man to look quite normal after he has been mortally wounded—since his rational world has collapsed. All this remains within the framework of the tragic consciousness. Hamlet sees and understands the horror; it throws him off the balance. He contemplates suicide, having no further use of life. The recognition also contains a call to action. He must live on to avenge his father's death. Even if he succeeds in this, revenge will not diminish the horror he has experienced. His mother's infidelity and the manner of his father's death are irrevocable.

## DISCUSSION

Hamlet is said to have been misled by the Ghost, the test of whose honesty is not the establishment of Claudius guilt but rather the nature of its injunction. He is called upon to execute private vengeance, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, contrary to all Christian teachings. His problem, then, is that of a man who believes in heaven and hell and whose reason and conscience tell him that the man who defies divine ordinance invites the divine wrath; the dread of something after death. Moreover, in pursuing the duty laid upon him by his father's ghost, Hamlet brings to light a state of disease, which affects the entire field presented to his consciousness. The ghost, in fact, acts upon Hamlet as a disturbing influence, imposing upon him a clear-cut failed obligation, to which all that is positive in his being responds; at the same time it confirms the presence around him of sinister realities which he feels, even as he repudiates them, to be obscurely related to stresses in his own nature. In this way, far from leading to resolution through the action, the ghost's message plunges the hero and his surroundings into obscurity and doubt (Traversi, 1969).

Hamlet finds himself in a position, which leaves him nothing but his own reflections on the nature of life. Life becomes impossible for him but consciousness remains. The tragedy enters