

SHAKESPEARE'S PRINCE HAMLET; PRIVATE THE UNWILLING INSTRUMENT

Mohammad Idris

Department of English NWFP Agricultural University, Peshawar.

Why, look you know, how unworthy a thing you make of me. You would play upon me, you would seem to know my stops, you would pluck out the heart of my mystery, you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass, and there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak. `Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you fret me, you cannot play upon me.
(Hamlet III, ii, 354-362)

Hamlet has been placed in the most stimulating circumstances that a human being can be placed in. He is grief-stricken on the sudden and unnatural death of his father. He does not consciously suspect that his father was murdered, let alone by his uncle, Claudius. He was deprived by his uncle of his father's throne, despite being his father's only son and heir apparent of the throne. His mother, far from being as shocked as Hamlet by her husband's death, married his uncle within a few weeks of becoming a widow thus enabling Claudius to justify the usurpation of the throne in virtue, if not in right, of his marriage to his deceased brother's widow. It could safely be predicted that Claudius would soon try to kill the rightful heir. Hamlet does in fact perceive that his life is in danger. Faced with an imminent threat to his life, Hamlet has an obvious course of action. He must kill Claudius as soon as possible in what is, in effect, self-defence. But his chances of catching the King off the guard are small. The King is possessed of the effects for which he murdered his brother, and one of these effects is the immunity from justice. In contrast, Hamlet cannot kill Claudius without any apparent convincing reason especially because he stands to gain the crown by the deed. He knows that only law of nature would justify his killing Claudius. Hamlet is paralysed while the inauspicious king, capable of inspiring deep affection, is swiftly consolidating his authority by effectively dealing with the crises¹.

Hamlet's exclusion from his father's throne is not Hamlet's problem on the whole but the recovery of it was virtually necessary for his survival and personal safety. The tension of the struggle for gaining the crown seems to run rather more prominently alongside the interest of Hamlet's personal ordeal.