



-Tikrit University\ College of Education for Women

-English Department

-Third Stage

-Elizabethan Drama

- Dramatic Devices in Shakespeare's Theatre

-Prof. Dr. Lamiaa Ahmed Rasheed

Lamia.ahmed62@tu.edu.iq

Seneca's influence on Shakespeare's Hamlet

Senecan tragedies heavily depend on language since the plays are not acted and to fill the gap of “deficiency” of not having action on the stage, Senecan tragedies employ rhetorical devices, detailed descriptions, hyperboles, so the whole burden is thrown upon the language.

The reason why English stage is affected by Senecan tragedies is its profound dependence on language and affiliation with figures of speech. Hamlet falls under the general framework and notions of Senecan tragedy.

Indications of the Impact of Senecan Tragedies on Hamlet

What Shakespeare borrows from Seneca is the revenge; a revenge out of a great wrong and injustice done against a major character. This theme of revenge is usually introduced by the ghost of a wronged person just as in the case of Hamlet's father who is obliged to wander in purgatory and hand over the revenge upon the shoulders of Hamlet. Introduction of the revenge by a ghost is not a discovery of Shakespeare; rather it is a theatrical convention coming from Seneca

In view of stylistic features, what Seneca gives Shakespeare is line-for-line dialogues known as soliloquy and meditative nature of characters. It was through Seneca's work that elements such as blood and violence, grand rhetorical speeches, and the appearance of ghosts would become part of staged productions, such as is seen in Shakespeare's Hamlet.

Seneca's stoicism, which envisages fatalism, man's weakness and his inability to confront the fate with its inevitable consequences, is one of Seneca's influences. In Hamlet, fatalism runs throughout the play; for instance, Polonius is killed while he is eavesdropping Hamlet's conversation with his mother, and Ophelia who is innocent except the quilt of requiting Hamlet's love and goes mad. Other Senecan peculiarity shared by Hamlet is the introduction of a ghost in to the play who calls for revenge and causes self-dramatizations of the tragic hero.

There is an obsession with crimes: Assassination of Hamlet's father, murder of Polonius and Hamlet's adept engineering on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's execution, Laertes and Hamlet's fencing which leads not only to the death of the both characters but also the murder of Gertrude and Claudius all of which remind the dire atmosphere of Seneca's plays.

Hamlet's post-Freudian association with Oedipus, meanwhile, though traditionally associated with Sophocles, is better understood as part of what we might call a Senecan Oedipus complex. In Senecan tragedy (including Seneca's Oedipus) the figure of the mother is one symbolic representation of the limits of human autonomy, but the symbolic meaning of the figure of the mother is not limited to a domesticated narrative of infantile development. Critics have asked why Hamlet, of all plays, should have become the key proof text for modern theories of

subjectivity and psychology; this chapter suggests that the nature of the play's engagement with Seneca may be a major reason.

Therefore, Hamlet's proximity to Senecan tragedies can be observed both in thematic and stylistic domains. Almost all the internal principles such as the span allotted to tragedy, error of judgment and recognition set by Aristotle, either lacks in Hamlet or does not suit Aristotelian notions. The objective of this study is to prove that Hamlet, which is a deep examination of the human soul with dramatic excitement, is written under the effect of Senecan tragedies instead of Aristotelian principles set forth in Poetics.