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Greed and Jealousy in *Hamlet* and The Story of Cain and Abel

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Abstract

Greed, jealousy, and revenge are several psychological cases which have been analyzed from various literary approaches. The current paper aims to do a psychological investigation by comparing such themes as greed, jealousy, and revenge, which all result in the common theme of fratricide in the biblical story of Abel and Cain and the story of Claudius and Hamlet's father. William Shakespeare (1564-1616) focused on the most complex dilemmas in his works, particularly Hamlet. He portrayed Claudius's character as evil to communicate a spiritual message to his audiences, signifying that jealousy and greed are malicious psychological problems and will ultimately result in the worst. It can also be seen that the story of Cain and Abel is a remarkable example of how greed leads to insidious motives. Stories of Claudius and Hamlet's father and Cain and Abel can be compared from several fields of knowledge, such as religion, art, social sciences, philosophy, history, and psychology. The other aspect that this paper will highlight is the effects that jealousy, greed, and hatred will leave on the human spirit.

Key Terms: *Hamlet*, Claudius, Cain and Abel, Shakespeare, Greed, Jealousy

According to Freud (1982, p. 66) and other psychologists, jealousy and envy are amongst the natural feelings that afflict all as they fall within the human psyche's structure based on complexity and ambiguity in principle. They also assert that jealousy is not harmful in all cases. Instead, it is necessary to some extent in order to stimulate ambition in the soul and fuel the desire for progress and success as long as it remains under control without making people full of hatred and envy. These issues corrupt and distort relationships with others



and deprive people of the sweetness of a sense of self-satisfaction, which leads to chaos in the mind.

As a superficial digression about this type of human being who carries jealousy, hatred, and greed, Aristotle (1974, p. 89) mentioned that a person without virtue is more vicious and brutal than an animal. Likewise, Mark Twain (2002, p. 63) asserted that man is the only savage among all animals and is responsible for the pain inflicted on others for the pleasure of doing so. As it is known, and since Cain and Abel, humankind's record is full of many heinous crimes committed by people under the influence of destructive feelings of jealousy. It is a matter that necessarily brings about intense anger, the desire for revenge, and the loss of the ability to perceive and distinguish rational behaviour.

Throughout the literature, it can be noted how arrogance and greed propel individuals to the height of success or their decline. The exact definition of ambition is "a huge desire to do or to accomplish anything, usually take dedication and perseverance," whereas greed is a "severe and vain desire for anything, especially wealth, strength, or food." (Ellwood, 1910, p. 68). Claudius kills Hamlet's father because, as Hamlet's chief enemy, Claudius is an astute, immoral, and conspiratorial man whose greed for power results in scheming against the king. Unlike his brother, Claudius is a crooked politician who lacks fighting abilities, yet he can control others by his language. He kills his brother not only to be the king but also to marry Gertrude as his wife. In other words, he wants everything owned by his brother, and his jealousy is limited to power and the love between Hamlet's father and Gertrude. Thus, it is clear that Claudius kills his brother to get the crown in Shakespeare's Hamlet. It could be claimed that not only does his greed overshadow any other feeling, but it will also ultimately lead him to his destruction. Greed



is an urge to get more than is required. Claudius is the king's brother, so we can conclude that he is greedy and socially jealous (Wellek, 1949, p. 49).

The first dispute in history occurred between Adam's sons, which led Cain to be a murderer and Abel to be a victim. The story of Abel and Cain embodies the eternal struggle that we still have today, which is between good and evil. These motives of the individual are the mirror of human nature. God perceives these motives and urges human beings to be pure. Once jealousy is produced in every human heart, their downfall becomes closer because greed and jealousy are the most dangerous scourges that drive a person to kill others. Abel was true and pure, while his brother, Cain, was jealous of him. Abel's honesty made his status great with God, while Cain's hatred motivated him to kill his brother. Maybe if Cain had asked his brother mostly on the right offering to God, he might have prevented the sense of jealousy that had risen to him (Hamlin, 2013, p. 76).

Claudius, Abel, and Cain's tales are regarded as the uncontrollable fate, the temptation and greed in human beings' conscience that leads them to commit heinous and unforgivable acts. Hamlet attempts to explain this temptation as evil by contemplating Claudius' murder. The Qur'an forbade killing and revenge with multiple verses and warned the murderer and the oppressor.

The first two sons of Adam and Eve, mentioned in Genesis, are Abel and Cain. Abel was a shepherd, while Cain, the older brother, was a farmer. The brothers offered oblations to God, but God approved of the sacrifice of Abel because of the sincerity of the work and intent it contained, and thus, Cain's gift was rejected; this matter aroused Cain's jealousy



and led him to kill his brother. Then, God punished him and sent him to the earth of Nod, where he founded a town, married, and became a father.

Central to this story is Cain's inherent selfishness, aggression, and extreme jealousy. The Quranic account of the story is similar to that of the Torah, suggesting that Cain's motive for committing the crime was the Lord's refusal to accept his sacrifice. Throughout their stay in Heaven, Adam and Eve did not make any sacrifice to God. Not long before, their two sons decided this was the best way to satisfy the Creator. As soon as this practice began, its inherent evil was tragically revealed. The question that critics debate is why Allah accepted Abel's offering while he rejected Cain's offering. Some of the Torah interpretations indicate a difference in the type of sacrifice. Abel's sacrifice was part of his flock of sheep, while Cain brought "the fruits of the soil" (vegetables and fruits) (Weil, 1895, p. 32).

God preferred the sacrifice of animals over plants, but these opinions are not reasonably convincing. Some religions argue that imagining God promoting such a dubious habit is difficult. Much Western Christian theology is still anchored in the idea that God requires sacrifices and offerings to be soothed and avoid His wrath. Some prophets explicitly said otherwise, meaning that God is not interested in human sacrifices and that he asks them to act with justice, love, and mercy (Shaheen, 2011, p. 49).

When Hamlet returns home to mourn his father's death, Claudius, filled with fear, decides to get rid of Hamlet because of his egocentricity. His greed and jealousy are the main factors in his unethical plans. Just like Claudius, Cain kills Abel due to jealousy and because he seems to have less power than him. Hamlin (2013) declared that Cain and Abel are counterparts to King Hamlet and King Claudius in *Hamlet* (p. 154). Just like Claudius,



who hides the immoral act he has done when the Lord asks Cain about his brother, he denies what he has done. However, God knows everything and punishes him by sending him to the land of wandering. Shakespeare alluded to the Bible because, at that time, there was a close association between the Church and the state. Conventionally, England was governed politically by the king and spiritually by the Church. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Shakespeare's works are filled with allusions to religious sources.

Hamlin (2013) has also said, "The standard trajectory of tragedy is a fall" (p. 154). This is why the stories depicting human beings' fall attracted Shakespeare more. Hamlin (2013, p. 161) has also announced that regarding the references to Genesis, the richest of Shakespeare's tragedies is Hamlet. The play also refers to the fall, where Claudius played the serpent's role. As Hamlet's father's ghost said to Hamlet: "Listen, Hamlet, everyone thought that a poisonous snake had bitten me while I was sleeping in the orchard, but this lie deceived everyone, but the snake that stung your father wears the crown of the throne"(Hamlet,1773. Act 1, Scene 5).

He refers to the real fall as a kind of seduction. This dialogue shows that Claudius is a snake that seduces the woman and kills her husband out of jealousy and greed for authority. Among the most prominent stories mentioned in Genesis, Hamlet hints at the first murder and man's fall. Hints appear in Abel and Cain's story and focus on the tale of the fall of man. This supported track illustrates the plot of revenge for Hamlet within the play. This plot shows the division between good and evil, leading to the motive of murder and revenge. Likewise, the factors that seduced Cain to kill his brother were jealousy, greed, and selfishness (Hamlin, 2013, p. 159).



A point that is also of high importance is that when Cain lies to God about Abel's murder, God decides to punish him by sending him to a type of place where Cain wanders forever. A similar event happens in Hamlet as well. When Claudius understands that Hamlet's madness is just a lie and he seems to know everything, he decides to send him into exile. Similarly, as noticed in the Bible, Cain is punished for his immoral act, while Claudius is punished due to his awareness. In short, Hamlet is not the antagonist but a victim, just like Abel, who was the primary victim.

Regarding the similarity between Cain, Claudius, Abel, and Hamlet, it should be stated that Claudius is aware that God will punish him for his crime, as in Cain's case, who felt guilty over the horrific act. Claudius also admits to the unjust act he committed against his brother and is not supposed to do that. Likewise, it happened with Cain, who realized the horror of his work. In contrast to Cain and Claudius's reaction, Shakespeare points out that Cain showed remorse, knew that his punishment would be very harsh, and asked God for mercy.

Remorse is taken from the reality that Cain promised God and said he would cover his face from him, that whoever found him might murder him. That is the shame within him that haunted him throughout his life. God is compassionate and gracious, but even though Cain killed a person, God let him survive. He placed a sign on him, making him survive for a long time. In comparison, Claudius insists on his guilt and does not ask for forgiveness from God because he knows it is hard to get forgiveness (Groves, 2007, p. 89).

Cain and Abel's tale is fascinating because it also poses many questions that one can comprehend about good deeds. Cain and Abel loved their mother, so it was not just Cain who had taken on his dilemmas. It is shown that their father and mother had sinned before



them, and it is no wonder that Cain did a dangerous act. This tale tells a lot of lessons about our contemporary age. First of all, we realize that belief is the ultimate blessing that can be given to God. We could see that Cain is offering his crop, not with a sincere heart. God sees it, yet he fails to admit it.

The Bible advises people not to live "the life of Cain," indicating no resentment in their souls, nor do they need to be jealous of their brothers and friends. One must be content with what others have so that God can honour and offer them what they ask him. A further moral lesson is deception. Mainly, since repenting, humans must not lie. Cain deceived God, and he realized that God had seen everything that he had accomplished. It was only fair to insist on the facts and beg for mercy. God is still going to forgive people. We are always meant to walk in the path of Abel.

Similarly, Claudius is unhappy with his status and decides to take his brother's position. Meanwhile, he ends up marrying Gertrude. Claudius has to murder his brother to control the empire, so why would he marry Gertrude? Gertrude, being a female, is less dominant than Claudius. There is never an accurate description of how they agreed to marry. Claudius, for example, decided to marry the princess to become king. Perhaps he married her because he wanted to replace his brother, not only as a ruler but as a husband. It also can be seen that Claudius blended into the position of Hamlet's father. He tells Hamlet to stop grieving his dead brother and think of him as his new father. Then, Claudius wishes to become the old king's substitute. However, Hamlet refuses him. Around the end of the play, Claudius starts plotting all these plans to destroy Hamlet. If Hamlet had welcomed Claudius as his new father, the story would have become an acceptable injustice.



Claudius, however, perceives Hamlet's faithfulness as defiant, even trying to intimidate. Since he could not get his nephew/stepson's attention and compassion, he decided to eliminate him. If Hamlet does not love him, he'll love no one else. Claudius likes to stay confident, yet Hamlet does not allow him to experience any conversely, potentially making Claudius feel broken and empty. Greed is often associated with low self-esteem, usually pressuring an individual who struggles with selfishness to pursue a replacement that can fill empty spaces (Burton, 1998, p. 168).

Experiments have also been conducted that connect mental problems, including schizophrenia and sociopathic tendencies, to greed. Frequently, greed is relevant to people who have power. It can be monetary, military, and academic. The argument is that individuals with dominant positions appear to let their need for more control flip into an insatiable need, ultimately becoming selfish (Lefty, 1993, p. 33). Claudius is a prime example of this statement. He has been conceived into aristocracy, and he has authority. Still, he wasn't the last son, which implies he does not have as much "authority" as his older brother.

It has been shown how jealousy has caused competition between brothers and sisters, leading to murders. Murdering a family member to steal their authority is something we continually see in Shakespearean plays, such as King Lear and As You Like It. When we think back, we have the facts of Abel and Cain. It is also very typical to experience jealousy of a family member. Claudius demonstrates a weak moment in Act Three when Hamlet is about to murder him in his room (Daniell, 2001, p. 54).

For such a short instant, we see Claudius, who recognizes how he has done something wrong. He confesses that murdering his brother is horrific, and he asks God



never to take the authority he has successfully taken. He is intelligent and utilizes his confidence as a great orator to get what he needs. He persuaded Gertrude to marry him or Laertes to obey his intent to murder Hamlet. Conversely, he used his skills to provoke subterfuge, killings, and other prosecutable misdeeds.

It is odd when he starts asking God for help because he knows that his behaviour is not authorized as good. Returning to mental illnesses, deception is one of the signs where these illnesses are connected without morality and often violate the process's rules. Unsatisfied with perpetrating one murder, Claudius eventually kills many of the characters in the play. Of course, this is not deliberate and demonstrates how others endured because of his greed. Claudius eventually dies because of his vicious plan, although it was difficult for him to obtain any assistance during the time he lived.

Claudius dies because of his greed, which has turned his soul into a person who is not convinced of repentance and is not satisfied with his crimes or his insistence on killing other personalities. His life ends while God has not forgiven him, unlike Cain, who realized what he did wrong and filled his heart with remorse by asking God for repentance. When scholars conduct psychological studies of Claudius 'personality, they may find that Claudius' character is complex and psychopathic, not content with the killing, but more than that.

Researchers could see what greed can do to individuals. Claudius had no need, and yet he still wanted too much. If he had been taught to comply with what he had, or what had rightly been his, he might have had a better end rather than his dramatic demise. Ultimately, we can consider that both the evil characters, including Cain and Claudius,



have killed their family members to take over the throne or were motivated by their greedy and jealous desires, highlighting the savagery of human beings (Cox, 2006, p. 66).

When God creates man to be a caliph on the earth, he is meant to be in the purest purity of the soul, intention, and good deeds and not despise himself to be under the influence of hatred, greed, and jealousy. In the aftermath of the murder, Cain felt so horrific that he did not know how to get rid of his brother's body. When God sent a raven to teach him how to do that, he felt contempt for himself and showed remorse and repentance for the horrific deed that he committed. Cain knows that his offence will not bring him anything but pain, regret, and torment, but he realized it too late.

A distinction must be made between courage, cowardice, recklessness, insanity, non-violence, caution, and patience. Cain thought he was brave when he set out to kill Abel, but in reality, he was a coward to follow his despicable instincts, vile thoughts, and animal soul. On the other hand, Abel was at the top of courage and wisdom when he said, "That I fear Allah" (Byron, 2011), and he overcame the motives of hatred and revenge as a reasonable man. Abel expected that his brother would kill him or hit him. So he said to him, "If you tried to hit me, I would not hit you because I fear Allah, and I fear that you will be one of the oppressors" (p. 78). The fear of God for Cain was the only guarantee of freedom and courage.

The Qur'an urges peace, avoids bloodshed, and warns the killers that their place is Hell because human blood, property, and freedom are among the holiest things in Islam and must be preserved in all circumstances. Therefore, the Qur'an mentioned the story of Abel and Cain to focus on this topic. God Almighty affirms the prohibition of killing in



one of his verses, indicating that anyone who kills someone for no reason would kill all people, and whoever saves someone would save all people (Sanders, 1895, p. 168).

This study was a comparative analysis of Hamlet by Shakespeare and the biblical story of Abel and Cain. It was concluded that Shakespeare's allusions to the Bible in his play showed his being under this religious book's influence. Religious references in Shakespeare's plays also proved the significant role of religion in the Elizabethan era. However, many critics had declared that he was not a religious person. He would use religious characters and narratives as a symbol that could embellish his literary career.

This issue may express why Shakespeare's sacred visions remain the subject of an enduring academic discussion. They examined their story from a contemporary perspective with a dialectical dimension. Some of those who later wrote about Cain and Abel noted that Abel's violent death resulted from an early class struggle. Violence is inevitable as long as society classifies people based on wealth and power rather than uniting them based on mutual sympathy and human fraternity.

Eventually, this paper intended to highlight the most negative emotions of human beings. It was stated that greed, jealousy, envy, and revenge can destroy others. As mentioned, Cain killed his brother due to jealousy and greed. He murdered Able because he could not attain what he desired as "God's favour." Hence, his malicious intentions caused him to murder Able. The present paper also focused on Claudius in Shakespeare's Hamlet. Claudius is an evil character in this play. The question is why William Shakespeare, as the most significant literary poet worldwide, focused intensively on Claudius. Shakespeare wanted to send an important message to his audience by shedding light and raising awareness of negative human emotions. It has been depicted that Claudius



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killed his brother and married his wife to take over the throne. This issue indicates that just like Cain, Claudius's greed and jealousy have led him to murder his brother. This paper is exceptionally significant since it has a straightforward yet spiritual message to raise awareness of human beings' spiteful emotions.



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