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The Preservation and Waste of Relationships

Hoarding is often seen as the pathological difficulty of discarding or parting with possessions because of a perceived need to save them. These possessions vary in value and are usually believed to be consisting of a physical body. However, this may not always be the case for hoarding. In this sense, hoarding can encompass the incorporeal, like creations of the emotional and mental states of the human mind. These assemblages of the tangible and intangible, particularly when quantified to the extremes, can become “bad collections”. These “bad collections” often entail a substantial negative impact on the hoarder and their environment. A particular instance of a bad collection that revolves around the incorporeal can be seen in Shakespeare’s tragedy, *Hamlet*, where the titular character and protagonist, Prince Hamlet, finds himself attached to hoarding, as an attempt to preserve and as an attempt to waste, the dwindling and fractured relationships within Elsinore.

In this tragedy, *Hamlet*, the story is primarily driven by King Hamlet’s death, giving way to the development of the plot and actions of the characters. The death of King Hamlet, ultimately, exerts influence and change on the relations within Elsinore. As the Prince of Denmark, Hamlet holds a well-established and healthy reputation within the kingdom. As Claudius recalls, “He’s loved of the distracted multitude.” (4.5.2665) With these words, the people of Denmark hold trust and love for Prince Hamlet before the start of the play. This grants the reader the means to measure the status of the relationships for Hamlet and within Elsinore

and how it has changed throughout the play. These attempts to preserve and waste relationships are like the often-fragile relationships in modern society, where people obsess over how they maintain their connections. This obsession is a presentation of the incorporeal form of hoarding, bringing forth the modern relevance of Hamlet in today's society.

To begin with an observation of the degradation and waste of relationships in Elsinore, two figures that hold clear changes with the death of King Hamlet and the ushering of Claudius are Guildenstern and Rosencrantz- the childhood friends of Prince Hamlet. Prior to the death of King Hamlet, it can be inferred that Guildenstern and Rosencrantz held an amicable connection with Hamlet, where the Prince describes him as his "excellent good friends" (2.2.1270), when they arrive at Elsinore upon Claudius's request. However, as Andrew Hadfield, an analyst on Shakespeare's works, states in *The Review of English Studies*, "All relationships are corrupted and abused at Elsinore. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are drawn into the plot by the king and queen and sent to spy on the prince" (570). With the rise of Claudius onto the throne,

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are visibly portrayed as sycophants-people who try to win favor from wealthy or influential people through flattery- as they oblige to Claudius's bidding; therefore, prompting this strain and corruption of their relationship with Hamlet. This apparent betrayal of friendship can be rooted from



Figure 1. Stoppard Tom, Joseph Ziegler
"Guildenstern and Rosencrantz are Dead" 2013

political upheaval of Claudius, where Hamlet loses his right to the throne by the hasty marriage of Claudius and Gertrude. It is in this act of the "friends" of Hamlet that provokes significant conflict between the prince and these sycophants, as Hamlet sharply exposes the intents of his childhood friends:

“You were sent for, and there is a kind of confession in your looks which your modesties have not craft enough to color. I know the good king and queen have sent for you... But let me conjure you, by the rights of our fellowship, by the consonancy of our youth, by the obligation of our ever-preserved love, and by what more dear a better proposer could charge you withal: be even and direct with me” (2.2.1325-1335).

In these words, Hamlet appeals to their childhood memories and bonds of friendship in an attempt to draw a truthful confession and to preserve their fragile bond. However, this attempt fails, leaving the relationship to fall apart, worsening as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern continue to heed the beckoning of Claudius and stray away from their friendship with Hamlet by acting as agents of corruption. This fact aligns with Hadfield’s claim that the relationships of Elsinore are corrupted and abused, as this relationship is destroyed when Hamlet sends them off to their deaths to England, where Hamlet displays his lack of guilt in this action, “They are not near my conscience; their defeat / Does by their own insinuation grow” (5.2.3561-3562).

This destruction and corruption between the childhood friends, while a momentous display of the changes of relationships within Elsinore, is simply one of many in this turbulent tragedy. A relationship that is as tumultuous as this story involves Gertrude, the “kingmaker”, and her melancholic son, Hamlet. As the woman that had provided Claudius with the passage to kingship, Gertrude has elicited a deep resentment from Hamlet, who still desires to preserve their mother-son relationship. Some Shakespearean analysts, like Ernest Jones, have even considered Hamlet’s drive for preserving his bond with his mother to the extremes of the Oedipus complex—the psychoanalytical concept that refers to a child’s unconscious sexual desire for the opposite-sex parent. It could be said that this was one of the catalysts for Hamlet in protecting and maintaining the bond with his mother. However, there are times when such attempts are pushed

away by Hamlet's intense emotions. One particular example is in Hamlet's first soliloquy, where he adamantly retorts:

“Frailty, thy name is woman!— / A little month, or ere those shoes were old / With which she followed my poor father's body, / Like Niobe, all tears. Why she, even she— / O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason / Would have mourned longer!—married with my uncle... / She married. O most wicked speed, to post / With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!” (1.2.330-341)

In this, Hamlet discloses his intense resentment against his mother's hasty marriage with Claudius, something that lingers even to the end of the play. This relationship was not pursued solely by Hamlet, but Gertrude had also sought conflicted refuge with her feeble attempts to preserve it. As Katy Lewis notes in her article, *Hamlet: Examining Love and Destruction*, “Act 3 Scene 4 is the imperative moment where their Mother/ Son relationship is most critical. Hamlet's violent turn causes Gertrude to question; ‘What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me?’ This pinnacle moment suggests that Gertrude is fearful of her son's madness” (2016) It is in this scene, and the ones following it, that emphasize the vulnerability of relationships within Elsinore. Returning to Claudius's side after her intimate but hectic exchange with Hamlet,



Figure 2. Gregory Doran, “Hamlet”, 2009

Gertrude reveals Hamlet's murder of Polonius; thus, betraying Hamlet. However, she keeps her promise to Hamlet that she would withhold the fact that Hamlet has been feigning his madness, which displays her conflicted attempts of maintaining this relationship with Hamlet. “In

the final act of the play,” as Lewis states, “Gertrude has a protective maternal instinct over her son. When Hamlet is offered a poisoned cup of wine, she drinks from it. Gertrude knows that the

wine has been poisoned but drinks it to save her son's life despite Claudius' plea for her not to do so. This determines the power and strength a mother has for her child." (2016) In other words, this mother-son relationship is a significant presentation of the instability and attempts of preservation and waste of relations within Elsinore.

While many of the relationships within *Hamlet* are "corrupted and abused", as Hadfield stated, there are some that are sustained and preserved in good condition. This can be seen in the strong bond between Hamlet and Horatio, but what seems preserved but still twisted is the relationship between the ghost of King Hamlet and Prince Hamlet. In this, Prince Hamlet holds an uncanny obsession with the ghost of his father, something that is both corporeal, as a physical manifestation, and incorporeal, as a memory. It can be seen by Hamlet's glorified perception of King Hamlet, as he described him as "So excellent a king, that was to this / Hyperion to a satyr. So loving to my mother That he might not beteem the winds of heaven / Visit her face too roughly.—Heaven and earth,/ Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him/ As if increase of appetite had grown/ By what it fed on" (1.2.323-329) and "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. / This was your husband. Look you now, what follows." (3.4.2439-2447) In other words, Hamlet envisioned his father as a god-like figure and a perfect husband, someone who went to the extremes of protecting her against the winds. Hamlet holds this fixation upon this idol of a man, exerting all his efforts to appease the supernatural entity, blindly following his words and revelations and even submitting to a blood oath for revenge. This maddened attempt to preserve the relationship and the memories of his father brings forth an idea laid out by Jane Bennett in

her book, *Powers of the Hoard*, where “hoarding is a coping response to human mortality” (253) It would make sense for this unusual obsession of Hamlet to grow in fruition, becoming a sort of coping response to his father’s death, where he hoards the memories to preserve this relationship and acts upon these memories which ultimately leads to the preservation and waste of other relations in the kingdom of Denmark; thus, creating the bad collection that corrupts the state of Denmark.

In essence, hoarding can involve the incorporeal and the corporeal, the tangible and the intangible. It is in this prospect that grants us the ability to examine the depth of collections, like the one in Shakespeare’s tragedy, *Hamlet*, where the titular and protagonist character, Hamlet, holds an unhealthy hoard of relationships within Elsinore. His efforts to preserve and waste these bonds, in which many become corrupted and abused, are a “bad collection” as it leaves a

negative, everlasting impact upon the state of Denmark. From the relationships of childhood friends, of a mother and a son, and of an idolized father and a praising son, the depth of Shakespeare’s work is elevated but also signifies relevance to modern-day society, where people hold a destructive obsession



Figure 3. Chattapat “Disappointed Love”

with hoarding toxic relationships, in both prospects of preservation and waste. This world-wide bad collection, whether inscribed on paper or transmitted through the internet, holds a detrimental impact upon our lives and it could be interpreted that Shakespeare holds the warning message to avoid this dire ending associated with this bad collection, where we may experience our own Shakespearean tragedy.

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