

HAMLET AND THE LION KING: AN INTERTEXTUAL COMPARISON

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Disney's *The Lion King* (1994) through the lens of intertextuality. Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality, Barthe's "death of the author" and Bakhtin's dialogism were used in the study to highlight how both texts share a common narrative while form, tone and resolution are still different. Central to both stories is the murder of a noble king by a jealous brother, the usurpation of the throne and the young prince's struggle to confront betrayal and reclaim justice. While *Hamlet* depicts the tragic nature and death of all the characters, *The Lion King* depicts rediscovery and hope and works on restoration and comeback. This comparison propounds how intertextuality has moulded and reshaped the narrative for new audience.

Keywords: *Revenge, Murder, Fratricide, Seize the throne.*

INTRODUCTION

Ben Johnson remarked Shakespeare as "not of an age but for all time" (45). Among the Bard of Avon's works, *Hamlet* stands out as endless inspiring reinterpretations are made day by day. Being an animated narrative that restructures Hamlet's central themes of betrayal and loss, Disney's *The Lion King* is one such reinterpretation meant for a younger audience.

Although *The Lion King* and *Hamlet* were produced centuries apart, they share a core narrative: the fratricide of a noble king, the usurpation of the throne and the young prince's journey to avenge his father's murder. However, differences in tone, resolution and cultural codes reflect how the narrative was reshaped for a much more modern and younger audience. This paper examines these intertextual relationships, demonstrating how *The Lion King* appears as a reinterpretation that alludes and parodies *Hamlet*.

METHODOLOGY

The study of the paper adopts a qualitative intertextual approach to explore the relationship between Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Disney's *The Lion King*. Drawing on the theories of intertextuality, the paper employs a comparative textual analysis of the texts tracing narrative and character correspondences within them.

An attempt to close reading was also implemented in order to focus on key elements such as the motif of revenge, the figure of the usurping uncle and the moral dilemma between kingship and responsibility. Throughout the study, *Hamlet* is treated as the primary literary text while the cinematic adaptation is analysed as a tool of recontextualization.

The study emphasizes dialogic interaction between texts showcasing how meaning is produced through repetition and transformation. The analysis explores how a classical tragedy is reshaped within popular culture, preserving the narrative flow across diverse cultural and historical contexts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Julia Kristeva introduced the concept of intertextuality in the 1960s which propounded that no literary work exists in isolation. Instead, each text is a “mosaic of quotations” – a blend of cultural, historical and linguistic codes woven together to generate meaning.

Roland Barthe's notion of the “death of the author” also posits that texts derive their meanings through intertextual relationships rather than from the author's intention. Thus, the role of the reader is crucial in the process. Both the texts have been studied through the lens of dialogism propounded by Mikhail Bakhtin which posits the coexistence of multiple voices and perspectives within a text.

FINDINGS

The narrative of the texts selected for the study here run on common story lines. The eponymous heroes of both *Hamlet* and *The Lion King* are young princes who lost their fathers to death and are on a mission to avenge their murders. The act of fratricide drives the plots forward. While in the *Hamlet*, Claudius kills his brother King Hamlet, it is Scar, Mufasa's brother who kills him in *The Lion King*. Both the murders take place with the motive of seizing the throne. Both the antagonists are portrayed as ambitious and jealous brothers.

The indirect reference of *Hamlet*'s opening scene in the Disney's adaptation hints an allusion. Mufasa's spirit urges Simba to “remember who you are.” This scene is an Interconnection of Act 1 Scene 1 of *Hamlet* where King Hamlet lets his son know that his death was a murder.

Many characters of *Hamlet* parallels with that of the adaptation. Scar mirrors the ambitious brother Claudius while Timon and Pumba parallels Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The latter are undercover spies assigned by Claudius while the former are loyal and funny sidekicks who stand by Simba in his lows and highs. These character parallels evident pastiche, a major component of intertextuality.

There exists elements of parody as humorous reinterpretation. For instance, “Hakuna matata” is a care-free philosophy which means “no problem.” Simba lives through the philosophy throughout his exile. This often parallels with the “not to be” notion of the famous quoting of *Hamlet* “to be or not to be is the question” (3.1.56).

Hamlet evolves around the central theme of revenge while *The Lion King* witnessed a transformation. Simba's tale is more of a narrative that focuses on responsibility, identity and self-discovery and has a just ending with Simba seizing the throne. This is not the case with the Shakespearean Tragedy where everyone faces a brutal ending. Also, *The Lion King* is portrayed as a coming-of-age adaptation where Simba grows with his parents and later faces his father's death while the King Hamlet's death is a media res reference in the play. This variation in the adaptation intends Disney's attempt to portray death as a slow and ready process owing to the theory that death is abstract for children. Similarly, the illegitimate relationship of Gertrude and Claudius is not carried to *The Lion King* and there are no elements evidencing such a relationship between Sarabi and Scar in the plot.

CONCLUSION

The Lion King is a dialogic text with intertextual elements of *Hamlet* and appears as an animated retelling of the latter. The adaptation was a reimagining across cultural and historical divides. *Hamlet* set in Denmark underwent a cultural adaptation when it came to *The Lion King*, which was set in an African Savannah with anthropomorphic animals.

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