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**Cómo citar este artículo:** McDanel García, M. A. (2017, enero-julio). Two Charismatic Giants of History and Literature: King David and Hamlet. *Rev. Cient. Gen. José María Córdova* 15(19), 309-332. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21830/19006586.86>



## Two Charismatic Giants of History and Literature: King David and Hamlet\*

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21830/19006586.86>

*Recibido: 15 de diciembre de 2015 • Aceptado: 2 de noviembre de 2016*

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Dos gigantes carismáticos de la historia y la literatura: el rey David y Hamlet

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Deux géants charismatiques de l'histoire et de la littérature: le roi David et Hamlet

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Dois gigantes carismáticos da História e a Literatura: o Rei David e Hamlet

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**Abstract.** This paper explores the parallels of various incidents in the stories of King David and Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, two giants of history and myth, in an attempt to illustrate the magnitude of their charisma. It will compare their leadership, their inner struggles, their relationships as soldiers, friends, enemies, sons, and lovers, and the deeds they are forced to perform. They can be found to be alike in many ways, including having a hint of bipolarism as defined by Kets de Veris (2006, p. 14), world expert in leadership. Bloom (1998, 2003), Caruso (2007) and Frontain & Wojcick (1980) have mentioned that King David and Hamlet, seen in the light of similarity, are of great interest in that they illustrate Shakespeare's knowledge of scripture as well as his ability and that of the scribes of the Old Testament to recognize a good story when they see one. This text intends to synthesize how the complete and profound human nature of each of these monumental figures calls the attention of generation upon generation of avid admirers.

**Keywords:** bipolarism, charisma, charismatic leader, David Myth, Shakespeare's Hamlet, human nature, parallels.

**Resumen.** Este artículo explora los paralelos en las historias del Rey David y de Hamlet, príncipe de Dinamarca, en un intento por ilustrar el carácter de su carisma. Compara su liderazgo, sus dilemas internos, sus relaciones y obligaciones en tanto soldados, amigos, enemigos, hijos y amantes. Los dos se asemejan en varios aspectos, entre ellos sus rasgos bipolares, tal como lo define el experto mundial en liderazgo, Kets de Veris (2006). Entretanto, autores como Bloom (1998, 2003), Caruso (2007) y Frontain & Wojcick (1980) mencionan que el rey David y Hamlet son figuras de mucho interés en tanto ilustran el conocimiento de las sagradas escrituras que poseía Shakespeare, además de su capacidad y la de los autores del antiguo testamento para reconocer una buena historia. Este texto intenta sintetizar cómo la completa y profunda naturaleza humana de estas figuras monumentales sigue llamando la atención y despertando la admiración.

**Palabras clave:** bipolaridad, carisma, Hamlet de Shakespeare, líder carismático, mito de David, naturaleza humana, paralelismos.

**Résumé.** Cet article explore les parallèles des histoires du roi David et du Hamlet, prince du Danemark, deux géants de l'histoire et du mythe, avec l'objectif d'illustrer leur charisme. Il compare leurs leadership, leurs dilemmes personnelles, leurs relations et devoirs en tant que soldats, amis, ennemis, fils et amants. Ils peuvent se ressembler en plusieurs aspects, par exemple, son bipolarité, selon Kets de Veris (2006), expert mondial en matière de leadership. Autres auteurs comme Bloom (1998, 2003), Caruso (2007) et Frontain & Wojcick (1980) ont mentionné que le roi David et Hamlet gardent un grand intérêt et illustrent la connaissance de Shakespeare de l'Écriture, ainsi que sa capacité et celle des scribes de l'ancien testament à reconnaître une bonne histoire. Ce texte essaye à montrer la façon dont la nature humaine complète et profonde de chacune de ces figures monumentales appelle l'attention de las générations d'admirateurs.

**Mots-clés:** bipolarité, charisme, leader charismatique, mythe de David, nature humaine, parallèles.

**Resumo.** Este documento explora os paralelos de vários incidentes nas histórias do Rei David e Hamlet, Príncipe de Dinamarca, dos gigantes da história e o mito, em uma tentativa de ilustrar a magnitude de seus carismas. Compara sua liderança, seus dilemas interiores, suas relações como soldados, amigos, inimigos, filhos e amantes, e as obrigações que devem executar. Os dois se comparam de muitas maneiras, incluindo um pouquinho de bipolaridade, como o define o experto mundial em liderança, Kets de Veris (2006). Bloom (1998, 2003), Caruso (2007) e Frontain & Wojcick (1980) mencionaram que o rei David e Hamlet, observados sob a luz de similitude, são de muito interesse e ilustram o conhecimento das sagradas escrituras que possuía Shakespeare além da sua capacidade e a dos autores do antigo testamento de reconhecer uma boa história quando o via. Este texto tenta sintetizar como a completa e profunda natureza humana destas figuras monumentais continua chamando a atenção e admiração de uma geração atrás da outra de admiradores ávidos.

**Palavras chave:** carisma, líder carismático, mito de Davi, natureza humana, paralelismos.



## Introduction

In addressing the phenomenon of Hamlet, Harold Bloom (1998) likened him to a “prince without a play” who has become an “independent myth” in the realm of such figures as Odysseus and Achilles, but with a transcendence that sets him apart from them and places him, “more aptly with the biblical King David” in his “charisma, and aura of the preternatural”. Bloom says, “I think that Hamlet was a new kind of man, and I have affirmed his affinities with the David of the Book of Samuel. —Hamlet remains apart, something transcendent about him places him more aptly with the biblical King David, or with even more exalted scriptural figures (p. 384). He is the “charismatic of charismatics”. Bloom goes on to ask the fanatic admirers of the Prince to consider which is more fascinating, “Hamlet” the play or Hamlet the man. In exploring for a source and model for the indefinable Hamlet, Bloom reflects upon the origin in the 12<sup>th</sup> century account by Saxo Grammaticus of Prince Amleth, whose story certainly parallels some of the events in that of King David, as does that of Hamlet, but finds that this ancient Danish Prince has characteristics “too grotesque” to be a close version of our Hamlet (p. 399). In his famous essay, Crawford (1916) points out the difference between the type of warrior detailed by Saxo, in which category we can include King Hamlet, and Fortinbras, and the intellectual strategist that is exemplified by Hamlet (pp. 33-46). The subjugation of nations by the warlords of old, or annihilation of them in the case of biblical figures, gives way to a more conscientious type of leader who seeks stability and wellbeing for his country and will make whatever sacrifice is necessary to preserve it. David was also a “new kind of man” in his intellectuality and of course his spirituality, in spite of annihilating whole populations of enemies in the expected tradition of his times. Bloom (2003) says of David; “In the Hebrew Bible David is a new kind of man, as is his descendent Jesus, in the Greek New Testament” (p. 7). Caruso (2007) states,

Outside of the Bible itself, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, is by far the most written-about literary work in the English language, and one which relies upon sacred Scripture to an unprecedented degree. The play is virtually crammed with scriptural parallels, but implicitly so, so that audience members who are not especially familiar with the Bible may not even be aware that such biblical material constitutes the integral literary-foundation of the entire drama (p. 87).

It would seem that the Bard employed what was useful to his purpose. Caruso goes on to assure us that anyone who is at all familiar with I and II Samuel will recognize that Shakespeare was so familiar with the scriptures that similarities arise almost without a conscious effort on the part of the author. “We had perhaps even recognized such ultimately self-evident facts as that the story of King David is the fundamental model of Hamlet’s character as it is presented to us on stage” (p. 104). Nobel (2002) also refers to Shakespeare’s use of the biblical, “Allusions to biblical incidents are more numerous than might appear at first sight. Shakespeare clearly made use of scriptural incidents to enrich his language and to provide himself with additional figures” (p. 22). Interestingly enough Bloom points out,

The poet Swinburne, a good Shakespearean critic, observed that, “The original characteristic of Hamlet’s inner nature is by no means irresolution or hesitation or any form of weakness, but rather



the strong conflux of contending forces.” I think that is a clue to Hamlet’s charisma, to his highly individual power over change and the final form of change—that is to say over nature and death.—Contending with unknown powers within his own self, the prince seems to struggle also with the spirit of evil in heavenly places (p. 96)

Certainly no one will disagree that David also was forced to contend with these “unknown powers” as well as “the spirit of evil in heavenly places”. The King, seen in the light of similarity to Hamlet, can easily be of interest not only in the parallel of various incidents in his story but also in the magnitude of the undeniable inner struggles which he found himself obligated to endure and the acts he was forced to perform. These two strangely different personages are alike in more ways than one, but particularly in their magnetism and charisma. In a review of “The David Myth in Western Literature” (Frontain & Wojcick, 1980), Wojcick (pp. 12-35) refers to the fact that in spite of so much effort, no one has been able to identify exactly what it is that distinguishes David as unforgettable.

In this text we will explore the likenesses and differences found in the Swordsman Actor Prince and the Warrior Musician King in an effort to synthesize in some way what it is that calls the attention of generation upon generation of avid admirers.

## The Gift of Charism

Just exactly how charismatic is charismatic? Kets de Vries (2006) classifies it as an enigma. “Leaders are supposed to have charisma—that mysterious ‘gift’ that emanates directly from God, a quality thought originally only to be possessed by prophets”. Both David and Hamlet have some right to a *gift from God* in the sense that David is indeed a God chosen and anointed King, from whom the Divine Right of Kings theory comes. According to Rabbi Spiro (s. d.),

David will become the only legitimate royal bloodline in Jewish History.—The idea of God ordained monarchy will be copied by many other nations throughout history and will serve as the basis for the concept of ‘the divine right of kings in Medieval and Renaissance Europe’ (p. 18).

The Stuarts and the Plantagenets, along with other royal houses, claimed to trace their ancestry back through decedents of the family of Jesus and so forth back to David. In Shakespeare’s mentality in Renaissance Europe, Hamlet, who is the son of an anointed king, is the likely heir to the throne and is considered as such by absolutely everyone including King Claudius. We can presume then that, as was the case of the Stuart King James I, Shakespeare would have inferred that Hamlet had a similar lineage back to King David. Hamlet will become a martyr to his defense of the Divine Right, and this concept in Shakespeare’s writing would have pleased King James I.

Perhaps this *gift* is what Kets de Vries (2006) means when he says “the charismatic element in leadership sweeps people off their feet; it’s the basis for the influence of true leaders.” He goes on to say that



charismatic leaders understand the symbolic power of playing the David-Goliath theme. They see the wisdom of dramatizing the risk of their particular venture and know how to maximize the adrenaline that risk puts into the system (p. 199).

He suggests that a lot of a great leader's charm is theatrical. They exploit playing the underdog, and they are masters of language using metaphors, similes and irony. The authors of I and II Samuel, the Psalms and Hamlet have certainly given their subjects these skills in language (p. 201). Certainly both David and Hamlet exemplify these characteristics, after all who could possibly know more about the David-Goliath theme, than David himself. Likewise, the Prince who faces the "Goliath" of having been deprived of everything important in his life, betrayed by his uncle/father/king and his mother/queen, dumped by his girlfriend and forbidden to return to his university studies, not to mention the eminent threat to his very existence, probably understands the concept as well. After all, he has more than one 'Goliath' to face.

Gedalof (1982) in his review of 'The David Myth in Western Literature' says,

"The David Myth in Western Literature' amply demonstrates that "David is a staggeringly complex figure who has played a bewildering number of roles and has been used in support of and against any number of beliefs and causes from the biblical period to the present.—David as musician, friend, warrior, king, penitent, and man of God. We are offered variety, which intrigues and informs, but it is difficult to make order out of elements presented" (pp. 356-57).

Bloom (2003) says, "The biblical new kind of man is King David, ancestor of Jesus, and the model for the chivalric ideal. The new Hamlet is the Danish (and English) David, come to confer his charisma as an image for our meditation" (p. 85).

Here the authors allude to our failure to pinpoint the mystery of the eternal charm of David and Hamlet, which seems to fulfill some unexplainable human yearning to identify someone capable of leaving us awestricken.

## **Crazy? —No. Bipolar? —Possibly**

Curiously enough, the great traits of attraction that these two portray often coincide with traits associated with what modern psychologists would probably identify as bipolar disorder. We certainly have no way of proving this, one of our subjects being a historical almost mythical figure, dead some 3000 years, and the other a character of fiction created 400 years ago. Yet they live in our minds and we ask ourselves what is it that actually makes them "alive" today? To answer this let us briefly explore some of the traits associated with the condition which Kets de Vires (2006) describes. Bipolar people experience extreme states of elation and depression. They are larger than life, they possess interpersonal charm, amazing energy, enthusiasm, intense emotion, and persuasiveness to influence others, great powers of observation, courage, optimism, and willingness to take risks. This is counterbalanced with a sense of hopelessness, weeping, suicidal thoughts, melancholic feelings, and self-accusation. They are unpredictable and impatient and prone to angry explosive outbursts that alienate those close to them (p. 37).



This may be an interesting factor for identifying their enchanting aura. Let us examine these two figures of royalty with reference to some of their qualities and the incidents that can be identified as parallel.

Bloom (1998) refers to Hamlet in this way,

It is very difficult to generalize about Hamlet, because every observation will have to admit its opposite. He is the paradigm of grief, yet he expresses mourning by an extraordinary verve, and his continuous wit gives the pragmatic effect of making him seem endlessly high-spirited, even as he mourns (p. 409).

Bradley(1971) says,

Trying to reconstruct from the Hamlet of the play, one would not judge his temperament was melancholy in the present sense of the word; there seems nothing to show that; but one would judge that by temperament he was inclined to nervous instability, to rapid and perhaps extreme changes of feeling and mood, and that he was disposed to be, for the time, absorbed in the feeling or mood that possessed him, whether it were joyous or depressed. This temperament the Elizabethans would have called melancholic; and Hamlet seems to be an example of it, as Lear is of a temperament mixedly choleric and sanguine (p. 87).

He concludes that Hamlet's reflections "represent that habitual weariness of life with which his passing outbursts of emotion or energy are contrasted" (p. 105).

We cannot deny Hamlet's suicidal thoughts at facing his disappointment, isolation and the inability to escape the paradoxical commands of King Hamlet's ghost. On the other hand, Hamlet's excitement at seeing his friend Horatio in court and again at the onset of the Mousetrap play are on the opposite end of the scale. Again we can refer to Bradley (*ibid.*):

'But this melancholy is something very different from insanity, in anything like the usual meaning of the word'. Claudius discerns this as possible danger to himself. *There's something in his soul, O'er which his melancholy sits on brood; And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose will be some danger* (Hamlet, Act III, 1, 71-75).

As for David no one can deny his elation and dance when bringing the Arc of the Covenant into Jerusalem, II Samuel, 6, 14-16, nor can we deny David's many moments of despair and weeping which are frequently recorded in the psalms. Psalm 55: 4-9 is an example in which his fear and despair are manifest:

I rock with grief, and am troubled at the voice of the enemy and the clamor  
Of the wicked. For they bring down evil upon me; and with fury they persecute me.  
My heart quakes within me; the terror of death has fallen upon me.  
Fear and trembling come upon me. And horror overwhelms me.  
And I say, "Had I but wings like a dove, I would fly away and be at rest.  
Far away I would flee; I would lodge in the wilderness.  
I would hasten to find shelter from the violent storm and the tempest.



David weeps many times and for many reasons. In I Samuel 30, 4 David enters Siklag to find it in ruins and that the Amalekites have taken captive the entire population, including his wives. He weeps for the death of his dearest friend, Jonathan, and ironically for that of his mortal enemy Saul. II Samuel 1:11-12. He weeps for the death of Abner, Samuel 3, 31, after the betrayal of his son Absalom, II Samuel 13:36. Again after being pardoned, Absalom conspires causing David to go to the Mount of Olives weeping. Samuel 16:30. David weeps bitterly again when he finds out that his orders to not kill Absalom are disobeyed (II Samuel 19:1).

As for being larger than life: “David is the biblical man for all seasons” (Frontain & Wojcik, 1980, p. ix). Another comment on David’s greatness and complexity of character is from the eighteenth century (and pretty much forgotten) author, Christopher Smart (1763), who translated the Psalms. In a lengthy poem of 86 stanzas called *A Song to David*. He sums up the qualities of David:

Great, valiant, pious, good, and clean,  
 Sublime, contemplative, serene,  
 Strong, constant, pleasant, wise!  
 Bright effluence of exceeding grace;  
 Best man!—the swiftness and the race,  
 The peril, and the prize!  
 (Verse 4)

His reputation grows after the Goliath encounter, but magnifies after a battle with the Philistines which caused the crowds to chant, “Saul has killed his thousand; David has killed his ten thousand.” 1 Sam. 1:5-7 This of course does not lend itself to building David’s popularity with the king, but rather causes a jealous reaction which will cause King Saul to pursue him until his own demise. Likewise Uncle Claudius expresses undeniable fear of Hamlet’s popularity with the common people, so much so that he is afraid to have him killed outright for fear that the people will turn against him and opts for sending him to England to get the job done. “Why to a public count I might go. Is the great love the general gender bear him” (Act IV.vii.17-18).

As risk takers, both excel. Courage is certainly not lacking in either. Hamlet, an only child (despite the many controversies about his age) is a university student and still somehow subject to his parent’s authority. For our purposes we shall consider him to be between eighteen and twenty two years old. He shows no fear of boarding a pirate ship to escape sure death in England (Act IV, III, 45-51), nor when he enters a duel with Laertes that he knows will take his life (Act V, II, 218-236). David, the youngest of eight boys and the Lord only knows how many girls, is probably younger still, yet he has no fear of facing the Philistine giant, or the Philistine hoards for that matter. Even then he boasts of already having killed a bear and a lion while protecting his family’s flock of sheep. From then on he will face constant danger in battle and in evading continuous plots to murder him.

Spontaneous angry explosions are common to both. As an example we can mention Hamlet’s rage at his mother in the closet scene. Hamlet cannot contain his anger and repulsion with his mother, neither at the beginning of the play in the court room scene (Act I,II, 76-8) where his sarcasm virtually bites as he insinuates that his mother and the king are dishonest in



their sentiments toward his deceased father nor in his mother's bedroom where he will render her helpless and frightened to the point that she cries for help (Act III, IV, 21-22), which results in the spontaneous murder of Polonius, and for which Hamlet shows no remorse. He also commands an ample vocabulary of insults for his "remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindles villain" uncle. Another example is his cynical mistreatment of Ophelia when she encounters him after her father has ordered her not to see him again (Act II, I, 74-97), and again his unkind remarks to her before the mousetrap play (Act III, II, 145-147). These show him both unpredictable and irate. Hamlet's anger at Laertes (Act 5, 272-301) when expressing his grief for Ophelia is another example. Hamlet, although more selective in his murders than is David, doesn't flinch to send Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their death, and he calmly tells Horatio that he is not sorry (Act V, II, 32-60). He will later, in the duel sequence, have the doors locked so that no one can escape and not only stab the King but pour the flask of poison down his throat! (Act V, II, 322-338).

David is not selective about killing his enemies in warfare and goes beyond bursts of anger and impulse and actually massacres hundreds of thousands, killing women and children as well as men (I Samuel, 27:8-12), along with destroying the animals in some cases (II Samuel, 8:1-14).

## Physical appearance —Use your imagination

We cannot deny that a pleasing physical appearance is always a boon for a great leader. Part of the charm of these two subjects may well be attributed to the way they look. In I Samuel 16:12, it is obvious that David was an attractive young man, "Jesse sent and had the youth brought to him. He was ruddy, a youth handsome to behold, and making a splendid appearance." Even Goliath comments on this (not without a tinge of disdain), "When he had sized David up, and seen that he was youthful, and ruddy, and handsome in appearance, he held him in contempt" (I Samuel 16:42). Again, "I have observed that one of the sons of Jesse of Bethlehem is a skillful harpist. He is also a stalwart soldier, besides being an able speaker, and handsome" (I Samuel 16:18). David intrigues our imagination with his diverse talents. We are offered a myriad of artistic interpretations of what David must have looked like. If asked to close our eyes and imagine him, we might well envision Miguel Angelo's 4.50 meter statue, the pride of Florence, which captures youthful perfection in all of its glory. We might also think of one of his many facets as the pious wise old king, the warrior, the harp player, or the giant slayer. There is a multitude of representations, all very flattering.

Hamlet of course, and here we will take the opinion of his girlfriend, is "The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword; The expectancy and rose of the fair state; The glass of fashion and the mold of form, The observed of all observers" (Act III, 2:59-62). This short description tells us a great deal about the prince. He, like David, is a "stalwart soldier" and also a swordsman who affirms that he practices this skill frequently. This he will prove in the duel with Laertes. He too is an "able speaker" as a scholar and as a diplomat. These words insinuate that he is a leader of men to whom the entire nation looks for example and guidance. His physical appearance also seems to be of youthful perfection, "the mold of form" and "the glass of fashion". For a more visual image of Hamlet we are provided with a list of famous actors, known to us by their other





more contemporary characters, whose artistic portrayals of the Prince are as varied as his character. Try to imagine some of these in their younger days: Kenneth Branagh (*Wallander*), David Tennant (*Dr. Who*), Mel Gibson (*Brave Heart*), Jude Law (*The Grand Budapest Hotel*), Kevin Kline (*The Conspirator*), Ben Whishaw (*The Hollow Crown*, *Perfume*, *A.I.*), Richard Burton etc., all of whom have portrayed the Prince. The rest depends on the preference of the person imagining Hamlet.

We may have no concrete description of the physical appearance of either David or Hamlet, but for their millions of admirers this actually heightens the imagination, allowing each of us to create our own version.

## National Heroes — The famous and the infamous

Every nation has in its culture special personalities who are considered national heroes. Israel and Shakespeare's Denmark are not the exceptions. Israel in David's time is under the command of a king with whom neither God nor the people are well pleased. The tribes are at war and King Saul has not obeyed the commands of God as the prophet Samuel has told him to do. Therefore God has withdrawn his support and appointed a successor of His choice, David. Walker places David, due to his repeated and usually cunning transgressions of God's code of conduct, in the "rogue's gallery of unlikely heroes" (p. XI-XII), and goes on to say, with a good deal of truth and irony:

And David, almost as much the fair-haired boy of the Old Testament as Jesus is of the New, pulls off some downright outrageous escapades for a moral hero. David in his Mafia mode strong-arms the poor people of the Judean hills into paying for protection, strong-arms some of them, like Nabal, to death. He upgrades His ambitious aspirations out of the lowlife neighborhood with the help of what looks suspiciously like timely and well-alibied contracts put out on political opponents. In a religious society where ritual propriety is sacrosanct, he eats the royal showbread, and defiles the sacred Ark. He holds the bible record for ineffectuality as a father, against tough Old Testament competition. He sweet-talks his best friend into giving up the kingdom to him. He takes way more wives than is good for a man, yet still feels the need to steal the wife of this loyal captain, then, to cover up the royal adultery, have him murdered. Yet somehow manages, through it all, to be a "man after God's own heart". —David's cheerful disposition, on the other hand, resonates with the old quip, "They'll never kick me out of church, I repent too damn fast. (Walker, 2013, p. 212).

On the other hand, David will methodically invade and expand his empire (not an easy matter, the Philistines, the Ammonites, the Arameans, the Moabites, etc.) thus uniting the tribes forever. This will require the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children. God's reward will be to allow him to establish a line of royal decedents that will culminate in Jesus, and establish Jerusalem as the capital city of his kingdom. All of this was carried out with the constant threat of sudden death at the hands of King Saul and the hordes of enemy tribes and tribal leaders including, not unlike Hamlet, some members of his own family. He gained the love and veneration of his people then and of all future generations, and the respect and admiration of all of his enemies. The name David is Hebrew for "beloved". This must be God's way of saying, "I love you", and perhaps represents God's universal love for each human being. David's character flaws



allow him to be enough like the rest of us (maybe worse) to be able to identify with his humanity in his joys and sorrows as well as in his sin, but also in his remorse and repentance. David was an unforgettable giant for his time in history, for our time, and in his mystified eternity.

Hamlet's name is Germanic in origin and means "home" or "village". Could this be an allusion to the inner most existence of each human being, where we feel either safe or perturbed with our personal joys and sorrows? This is significant when we analyze the character and personality of Hamlet, the man. He is so like each of us (again maybe worse) in his struggle with circumstantial and inner dilemmas that we feel at home in our personal identification with him. Bloom (2003) questions, "Why are we persuaded that somehow Hamlet fights for us?" (p. 99). Hamlet, rather than just being larger than life, is life itself. As the actor David Tennant, whose modern Hamlet (2009) enjoys such wide acclaim, said, "You find yourself standing on the stage, not as Hamlet, but as yourself. The role forces you to reveal parts of yourself".

As for deserving to be included in the "rogues gallery of unlikely heroes" we can make a case for Hamlet. Let us consider some of his faults. He is cruel and heartless in his treatment of Ophelia. He is cynical in his humorous quips with Polonius, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Osric. He sends his two college buddies to their death and declares that he is not sorry, no more thought given to the matter (he is also smart enough to just happen to have his father's signet ring in his pocket to be able to seal the order). The same goes for Polonius. He disrespects his mother to the point that she fears for her life and the ghost has to interfere. He is responsible for eight violent deaths, 5 of which, including himself, were young with promising lives ahead, his mother, his uncle, and an innocent, if meddling, old man. This does not sound exactly like the "expectancy and rose of this fair state" (p. 97). As Bloom (1998) puts it, "We and Horatio agree to love Hamlet despite his crimes and blunders and despite his cruelty. We forgive him because we have to forgive ourselves. We are Hamlet – the theater is the mind".

If David was a great warrior and strategist, Hamlet is no less. Both of them have the greater good of their people as their utmost motivation, and both suffer infinitely for their flaws of character. Hamlet's self-control could arguably be said to be more admirable than David's. As Crawford (1916/2008) points out, he must restore the country from the "background of general corruption" that uncle Claudius has instigated; he must revenge the murder of his father; he must try to return his mother to a virtuous existence; he must defend the nation from foreign aggression; all this while trying to prepare himself to either reclaim the throne as rightful heir or die trying while dodging the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune". Hamlet is not about to kill the king when he has the chance, as David also would not have done (although for different reasons). In both cases this would contribute to the country's disorder. He observes as Denmark prepares for war with Norway and he will not do anything foolish and give the enemy the advantage of suddenly losing its king, no matter how much he would like to eliminate Claudius. As for choosing a successor to the throne, it would seem that, given his unhesitating dying response, Hamlet had previously carefully analyzed what to do if things didn't turn out well in the duel. Although he knows he is an able swordsman Hamlet is resolute to put an end to the situation, even if he is slain by Laertes. He has reached his limit as he says to Horatio in the words that cause our empathy for him to escalate, "Thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart; but it is no matter." Act V, ii, 222-3 Hamlet will take the chances he must take knowing that it may



mean death for himself, but the reign of Claudius must come to an end in favor of the wellbeing of Denmark, and he knows that whatever it takes to obtain this will be tragic. In his final agony Hamlet's concern is for Denmark, as Bradley (1976) remarks,

He has will, and just time to think, not on the past or of what might have been, but of the future: to forbid his friend's death in words more pathetic in their sadness than even his agony of spirit had been; and to take care, so far as in him lies, for the welfare of the state which he himself should have guided (p. 118).

Hamlet has shown frank admiration for Fortinbras for his determination to fight at the head of his army to restore his lost lands, and trusts that the Norwegian Prince and a cousin, for lack of a Danish candidate, will probably try to restore Denmark to its former state of prosperity and peace. With his dying breath Hamlet proclaims,

But I do prophesy the election lights  
On Fortinbras. He has my dying voice.  
So tell him, with the occurrents, more and less,  
Which have solicited. The rest is silence. (Act V, 2, 366-369)

These last words are in concern for his country, as would become a National Hero.

## **Like father like son? —No!**

Heredity seems to have nothing to do with the success of these two giants. Neither one of them is at all like their fathers. Jesse of Bethlehem, whose importance lies in his being the father of David, seems to be quite unobtrusive. He is a tribesman from Bethlehem who has many children and possesses a large flock of sheep. He brings out seven sons one by one for examination by Samuel who has come in his search for the new king. He neglects to even call his youngest son from the fields for the event. If he had not been prompted by the prophet Samuel, David, the great king and warlord, may never have gotten into the picture. That is about it. We can hardly imagine Jesse, even as a young man, killing giants and lions and bears, not to mention masses of Philistines, although, in all fairness, he may have had to face a lion or bear upon occasion. In any case what we know about Jesse stops there. We can observe that he does not seem to communicate very much with his youngest son either before or after he becomes King, even though later on David does show some concern for his family members.

On the other hand, King Hamlet doesn't even let death stop him from communicating with young Hamlet. Dressed for war, more like Beowulf than like a courtly monarch, this great general and conqueror of the lands of Norway, pours out his heart to his son about his murder, his adulterous wife, his Cain like brother, and gives complicated and contradictory orders on how to take revenge, while at the same time giving us a glimpse of the afterlife. Bloom (1998) says, "Of the qualities that make the prince so remarkable, the warrior father seems to have possessed none whatsoever" (p. 390). He refers to Alexander (1995) noting "that the ghost is a warrior fit for



Icelandic saga, while the prince is a university intellectual, representative of a new age. The two Hamlet's confront each other with virtually nothing in common except their names" (p. 387). Young Hamlet is a representative of the age of Renaissance, with an artistic spirit and great skill as an actor. He is quite overwhelmed by the occurrences at Elsinore. While he does not lack the attributes proper to a great king and leader as well as a soldier, he is no warlord. He is not going to be spontaneous in taking revenge no matter how depressed he may be at his father's murder and mother's unfaithfulness and frivolous marriage. Although he has sworn to carry out his father's post mortem commands, he will prepare himself with cunning like the great strategist that he is. However when anger does get the better of him and he loses control, the ghost has to give him a nudge, "Do not forget. This visitation is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose" (Act III, 4, 110-11).

## Artistic abilities —Undeniable

Another aspect that must be considered is the artistic side of the two characters. David is attributed authorship (sometimes contested by modern scholars) of at least 73 of the 150 Psalms used in the religious rites of Judaism, Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Oriental Christianity, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Anglicanism, in Bach, and even the Rastafarian movement and other modern songs such as Bonni M's "*By the Rivers of Babylon*." When the monarch was tormented by "evil spirits", David's musical aptitudes had already gathered enough fame to have him recommended as a musician who could sooth the anxiety attacks of King Saul. This leads to him being admitted to the inner circle (or tent in this case) of the king's most intimate existence, thus gaining his trust enough to have the young man named his personal arm bearer and body guard. I Samuel 28, II David can't contain himself from dancing when he brings the Arch of the Covenant into Jerusalem. His wife Michal chides him for looking undignified while dancing in the streets. For this she is condemned (by God, who is happy with David's display) to be childless. II Samuel 6:1-23 David will also demonstrate his attributes as an architect by leaving Salomon his plans for the great temple of God, complete with gold, silver, bronze and iron, cut stones, cedar, and stonecutters, carpenters, and masons to build it. He could not have it constructed himself because of the great quantity of "blood on his hands" (I Chronicles. 22:2-16). Also within the range of artistic abilities we must point out that David is an actor, as will be illustrated in this document.

Hamlet tells us that he has often been to see plays and amazes us with his interpretation (15 lines) speaking of "Priam's slaughter". So well does Hamlet pronounce the words that Polonius exclaims, "Fore God, my lord, well spoken, with good accent and good discretion" (Act II, ii, 49-78). Hamlet will proceed to give precise acting instructions to the professional players who have come to the castle. His words are surely those of the Bard himself coaching his players during rehearsal. His some fifty lines were good advice then and they still are good advice for today's actors in their attempt to "imitate humanity" (Act III, ii, 18-39). Bradley comments, "In his instructions to the actor on the delivery of the inserted speech, and again in his conversation with Horatio just before the entry of the Court, we see the true Hamlet, the Hamlet of the days before his father's death" (p. 106). When King Claudius runs out of the "mousetrap" production



and Hamlet realizes that he has proven the king's guilt, he calls for music. Theatrical? When we ask ourselves who the king of theater is, we automatically will answer that Hamlet will probably reign forever, however David is not left behind.

## The insanity issue: Actors? —Crazy like a fox

Having run away from Saul and finding himself in grave danger in the kingdom of Gath, David demonstrates his acting ability when he, like Hamlet, resorts to playing a madman to avoid being murdered by King Achish. David's portrayal allows him to froth at the mouth, babble nonsense and beat his head on the gates of the city in order to look and sound crazy enough to save himself.

David took note of these remarks and became very much afraid of Achish, King of Gath. So, as they watched, he feigned insanity and acted like a madman in their hands, drumming on the doors of the gate and drooling onto his beard. Finally Achish said to his servants: "You see the man is mad. Why did you bring him to me? Do I not have enough madmen that you bring in this one to carry on in my presence? Should this fellow come into my house?" (I Samuel 21:13-15).

Hamlet, is an actor without equal who will act deranged throughout the play so that he seems not to present a danger to King Claudius. As Veith & Gene (1980) points out, this is one of the most obvious parallels in the stories of the two royal subjects of our study. Both take on the role of a madman to save themselves from being annihilated by the reigning enemy king (p. 73). After hearing the ghost the Prince will carefully announce his intention, "I perchance hereafter shall think meet To put antic disposition on—". Act I, v,71-2 Hamlet's play acting is far more prolonged than David's, but not any more convincing. It is evident in his "crafty madness" Act III, i. 8; in his speech with "a happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be delivered of" Act II, ii, 9-10; in his ability to use his intellect and plot his actions so as to convince poor Ophelia that his "noble mind is here o'er- thrown!"; and it leads Claudius to realize that he is dangerous, "Madness in great ones must not unwatched go" (Act III, i. 189). Bradley refers to Hamlet's insanity in these words:

What has Hamlet done? He has put on an "antic disposition" and established a reputation for lunacy, with the result that his mother has become deeply anxious about him, and with the further result that the King, who was formerly so entirely at ease regarding him that he wished him to stay on at Court, is now extremely uneasy and very desirous to discover the cause of his "transformation" (p. 103).

## Friendship —Selective

Both of our heroes, in their internal struggles and in their quite physical ones, find solace and true friendship in only one individual, just as many great superheroes of our times have someone to depend on. Batman has his sidekick, Robin, and the most ancient of heroes in British Literature,



Beowulf, has his faithful friend Wiglaf. In the case of David it is Jonathan and in the case of Hamlet it is Horatio.

Jonathan, son of David's great enemy, King Saul, will risk his very existence to protect his friend from his father's intentions to kill him. He will inform David of the King's plans and give the solution to avoid them by shooting an arrow beyond the target and telling David to escape before it is too late, thus saving David's life.

—The next morning Jonathan went out into the field with a little boy for his appointment with David. There he said to the boy, 'Run and fetch the arrow'. And as the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him in the direction of the city. When the boy made for the spot where Jonathan had shot the arrow Jonathan called after him, 'The arrow is farther on'.—The boy knew nothing; only Jonathan and David knew what was meant.—When the boy had left, David rose from beside the mound and prostrated himself on the ground three times before Jonathan in homage. They kissed each other and wept aloud together. —'The Lord shall be between you and me, and between your posterity and mine forever' (I Samuel, 20, 1-42).

Hamlet alludes to the arrow incident mentioned when he says to Laertes:

Let my disclaiming from a purposed evil  
Free me so far in your most generous thoughts,  
That I have shot mine arrow o'er the house,  
And hurt my brother (Act V, ii, 252-255).

Here he contrasts himself with Jonathan, who with precision shoots the arrow and warns his friend David to escape. Hamlet on the contrary, although not on purpose, has figuratively shot his arrow causing harm and destruction to Laertes and all of his family rather than harming only Claudius.

David's gratitude and loyalty to his friend will extend to Jonathan's crippled son who he will honor and protect as long as he lives.

Fear not, David said to him, "I will surely be kind to you for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul, and you shall always eat at my table". Bowing low, he answered, "What is your servant that you should pay attention to a dead dog like me?" The king then called Ziba, Saul's attendant, and said to him, "I am giving your lord's son all that belonged to Saul and to all his family. You land your sons and servants must till the land for him. You shall bring in the produce, which shall be food for you lord's family to eat. But Meribbaal, your lord's son, shall always eat at my table. — He was lame in both feet. (II Samuel, 9, 6-13).

Hertzberg (1968) comments in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* that "David was Jonathan's alter ego" (p. 171). Indeed it seems to be true, as Jonathan so many times manifests his love for David and defends him in words and deeds against his father's wrath. There seems to be a kind of mental connection in his admiration in which he sees David as his role model rather than his father, Saul. It is a win-win situation, with David reaping more than he has sown. Wojcik (1980) has this to say:



Saul it is said, keeps David at his court after the fight with Goliath, not because he admired his prowess—in fact he was jealous of him somewhat— but because “he saw Jonathan had given his heart to David and had grown to love him as himself.” The text says explicitly that it is because of Jonathan’s favor that David advances to command in the army. Throughout the narrative, only Saul’s affection for Jonathan remains strong enough to lull Saul’s increasing jealousy over David’s achievements until the balance tips when he hears how much the people have grown to love David too (p. 15).

The loyal Horatio, who as a character is as flat as a pancake, also seems to envision the “sweet prince” as the perfect role model and his own idea of the ideal man. We have to agree with Bloom (2003):

We may wonder where does Horatio find the eloquence that responds so beautifully to Hamlet’s final ‘the rest is silence?’ Horatio utters a hope—not a certainty—for an angelic chorus: ‘Now cracks a noble heart. Good night sweet prince, and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest’ (V, II, 359-60) (p. 18).

We can notice the same devotion and admiration in Horatio as we have seen in Jonathan. Horatio thinks immediately to inform Hamlet of the ghost’s appearance. Hamlet, on the other hand in the beginning, hasn’t noticed that Horatio is in court and almost doesn’t recognize him at first. Nonetheless, when Horatio calls himself Hamlet’s “poor servant”, Hamlet answers with great difference, “Sir, my good friend; I’ll change that name with you”. They continue to joke like the college mates they are, and Horatio responds with quiet sympathetic prudence to Hamlet’s sarcasm about his mother’s wedding (Act I, ii, 63-83).

Bloom (2003) points out:

All we know of Horatio is that Claudius does not even try to suborn him, which renders him unique at Elsinore. What matters is that Horatio loves Hamlet and desires no existence apart from the Prince. He goes on to say, ‘And yet there is no one else in all Shakespeare who resembles Horatio, whose gracious receptivity lingers on in our memories of the drama’ (p. 15).

Is it not possible to suggest that likewise Hamlet serves as the alter ego of Horatio? Hamlet lets us know early on that he and Horatio are good friends (Act I, ii, 160-165), and we will see this friendship grow and solidify as Horatio shares and safely guards the deepest darkest secrets of the Lord Hamlet’s troubled heart, including the guilt for the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The Prince will openly express to Horatio his honest love and appreciation for his friend:

Horatio, thou art e’en as just a man  
As e’er my conversation coped withal.  
—Nay, do not think I flatter. —Dost thou hear?  
Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice  
And could men distinguish her election,  
S’hath sealed thee for herself for thou hast been  
As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing,  
A man that fortune’s buffets and rewards



Hast ta'en with equal thanks; and blest are those  
Whose blood and judgment are so well commedled,  
That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger  
To sound what stop she please. Give me that man  
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him  
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,  
As I do thee... — (Act III, ii, 59-80)

Horatio stands with Hamlet to face the ghost, and tries to protect him from any harm the ghost of the King may pretend. Hamlet demonstrates his trust in his one true friend when he returns to Denmark by first telling only him of the happenings on the ship and foreshadows that he will tell him more later on Act IV, vi, 13-32. He arranges to have only Horatio follow the sailors to a meeting place.

Horatio fears for Hamlet's life and tries to persuade him from entering the duel with Laertes and offers to intervene, "If your mind dislike anything, obey it. I will forestall their repair hither, and say you are not fit" (Act V, ii, 27-9). Finally Hamlet will not allow Horatio to die with him and he entrusts Horatio with his most sacred last wish to tell his story and clear his name of any misinterpretation and to make sure that Fortinbras becomes king. Horatio has the last word to the "yet unknowing world how these things came about", and he continues to proclaim it to us four centuries later (Act V, ii, 390).

## Matters of the heart —Ouch!

Neither of our two subjects are what we could determine lucky or successful in matters of the heart. As with many great figures, love seems to either escape them or own them. Hamlet does love Ophelia, however he doesn't seem to have the strength or dedication to actually do much other than make snide remarks about the brevity of woman's love and declare that they use makeup to hide what they really are. He finally dispatches Ophelia off to a convent with some pretty insulting insinuations. The words of an old song by Wiseman (1944) fit very well here: "You always hurt the one you love, the one you shouldn't hurt at all". In this case hurting Ophelia certainly didn't help Hamlet's cause, but rather took from him the one other person besides Horatio that might have offered him some support. On the other hand Ophelia's youth and dependency upon her father's will and her brother's warnings did not allow her to show any strength of character in defending her love for Hamlet. She follows orders to stop seeing him and to return his letters and gifts without making any protest. As it turns out, the impetuous murder of Polonius is the final blow for the frail spiritless Ophelia. When the Prince realizes that she is dead his reaction is of frustration and anger, but the sense of loss and abandonment that she had provoked had long been with him prior to this. It is interesting to imagine what Hamlet's end would have been if he and Ophelia had actually fought for their love and found strength and understanding in each other's moral support. We can hardly classify Ophelia as a pillar of strength who would have supported her boyfriend in his times of trouble, but it seems that deep inside neither one of them believed that they could do anything about the situation. Bloom (2003) reminds us that "Prince





Hamlet is not exactly one of Shakespeare's most loving characters, though he protests otherwise" (p. 59). Thus it is that the Prince is not lucky in love. Shakespeare must have had a difficult time making himself write Hamlet's awful love poem, the antithesis of the Bard's ability (Act II, ii, 116-124).

As for his Highness David, with all of his politically acquired wives and concubines, we do not see true affection (perhaps at least physical attraction) even in the case of Bathsheba, who upon discovering that she was pregnant and after all else failed, he made an "honest woman" through marriage. The women seem to be more possessions than companions for life. When they were kidnapped he went after them with what seems to have been more for honor than for dedication and love (I Samuel, 30, 1-8). There are even modern interpretations of the David story that insinuate that he was more attracted to Jonathan than to the ladies. David got into big trouble with God for the Bathsheba escapade, but there is no mention of God being displeased because of Jonathan, and He probably would have been (check Leviticus 18:22). We can find no indication of repentance (which David did a lot) with reference to his friend.

As for Bathsheba, what virtuous and upright loyal wife would be taking a bath on a terrace in front of the King's roof where he often walked after his nap? There is no indication that she was reluctant to go straight over to the palace when David had her summoned. However, in all fairness to her, in those days it would probably have been dangerous to say no if summoned by one's king. It is logical to presume that it happened more than once, as it seems unlikely that the first and only visit resulted in immediate pregnancy. If God was not happy with David's conduct, He was less happy about the way David handled the problem of her husband, the soldier Uriah, who, after failing in his attempts to get him to go home and sleep with his wife, has him set up for death in battle. For this the couple is chastised with the demise of their first son.

Many years later, when the king is about to "*rest with his ancestors*", Bathsheba succeeds in usurping the throne from Adonijah, David's older son who had already claimed it. She goes to a sadly senile king and gives him the old "you promised me and swore" argument (This reminds us of the arguments of Lady Macbeth). The King has Solomon enthroned, complete with a triumphant ride on the king's royal mule, causing the confused crowds to switch allegiance in a hurry (I Kings, 1:32-46). With some reflection on the circumstances it is difficult to imagine Bathsheba as extremely virtuous, and it is not difficult to imagine David as not as cunning at love as he was at war. However, God's plan works out in the end and their son Solomon reigns wisely, if not as faithfully to God's plan as he should have done.

## Ghosts — Scary

Going on to a less tangible influence, and not exactly in the category of friendship or love, let us consider the element of the supernatural in the form of a ghost in both of our subjects' accounts. As pointed out by Veith & Gene (1980), Saul, in his fear of the Philistine army and his assurance that God had abandoned him because of his disobedience, boldly has the ghost of the prophet Samuel conjured up by a witch in order to know the future. The Israelites would have believed but certainly would have had their reservations about communicating with a ghost, especially



after King Saul himself had previously ousted the witches from his territory following God's orders, and prohibited all contact with such apparitions. Nonetheless he seeks one out, thus further provoking the wrath of God. The ghost will predict that the battle will be lost and David will be king. The ghost's predictions come true and Saul finally, after the prophecies of defeat are fulfilled, prefers to end it all by falling on his sword (p. 76). Thus David, innocent of the ghost's prediction, and after a good deal of warfare too extensive to mention here, is proclaimed heir to Saul's throne (I Samuel 27-31). David's ghosts are of a different kind, and will haunt him throughout his entire life. They may not appear to him in any specific form, but they are forever in his conscience. For example there is the ghost of Uriah, as mentioned above. The ghost of his son Absalom and the hordes of the ghosts of the men, women and children he slaughtered in battle all play on his mind throughout his life to the point that David does not build the temple of the Lord because of the bloodshed he has caused.

The Elizabethan populace would have been pleasantly intrigued with the ghost of King Hamlet, and would have been quite happy to believe it possible that he could manifest himself without the help of a conjuring witch and communicate with the un-expecting young Hamlet. Hamlet, who is being prepared at university and should, by logic, be the next king, unlike Saul, speaks personally to the ghost who seeks him out and gives him three orders, which in turn are almost impossible to fulfill. These will set him up for his own destruction in the end, rather than steering him on to the crown. He is to take revenge by murdering the King (a risky business indeed); he must not let the information given him drive him to irrationality (however mind boggling it may be); he must not take any action against his mother for her part in the tragedy (at this point Hamlet is more disappointed and disgusted with his mother than with his uncle); he is also told not to forget the ghost! (as if anyone could forget talking to a ghost) (Act I, v, 81-91). We can hardly blame Hamlet when he exclaims "O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else? And, shall I couple hell? O, fie! Hold, hold, my heart, And you my sinews, grow not instant old, But bear me stiffly up" (Act I, v, 92-95). We can certainly understand this reaction, anyone in Hamlet's shoes after hearing the ghost's lamentations would be subject to heart failure or fainting!

## **Kill the king —Not so fast!**

Another obvious parallel in the stories lies in the various direct attempts on the lives of our heroes by the kings who fear them and consider them a threat to life and throne. Obviously, both of our heroes have cause enough to want to eliminate their enemies. God seems to get in the way in both cases. Our heroes also coincide in their choices not to harm the kings when the opportunities arise. King Saul makes no less than three attempts to kill David, two of which find David dutifully playing the harp trying to calm the king during one of his rages. It must have been quite a challenge for David to keep the music sweet and relaxing while dodging a spear.

The next day, an evil spirit from God came over Saul, and he raged in his house. David was in attendance, playing his harp as at other times, while Saul was holding his spear. Saul poised the spear, thinking to nail David to the wall, but twice David escaped him (I Samuel 18:10-13).



And again, after considerable argumentation in his favor by David's friend Jonathan who persuaded his father to spare him, David returned to the battlefield and also resumed his harp playing in the king's service.

Then an evil spirit from the Lord came upon Saul as he was sitting in his house with spear in hand and David was playing the harp nearby. Saul tried to nail David to the wall with the spear, but David eluded Saul, so that the spear struck only the wall, and David got away safe (I Samuel 19:9-10).

With good reason David might want to get rid of Saul, and he has more than one chance to do it. After considerable fight and flight from King Saul's army, David finds the king and company asleep in a cave where he quietly approaches and cuts off a piece of his garment which he later shows Saul as proof that he had the chance to kill him and nonetheless spared him. David has another chance when he entered Saul's camp and again finds him asleep. This time he takes Saul's spear and his water jug to prove that he had been there. I Samuel 24 & 26, David will not raise his hand to harm God's anointed king, even when his reasons are justified. Here we can appreciate David's spirituality as a man of God who does not wish to displease the Almighty, and the respect that a soldier would have for his general.

The attempts on Hamlet's life are less obtrusive but just as lethal as those of King Saul. Claudius does not want to take the blame for the dreadful deed. First he plans to have the job done by a foreign authority in England, thus appearing guiltless in the eyes of the people. The second attempt also involves a plan to have someone else do away with the Prince during what should appear a friendly fencing match, which as we all know worked. However he did not count on eliminating the Queen, Laertes and especially himself in the process. Despite Hamlet's certainty that his own life was in peril, when given a unique opportunity to carry out the ghost's orders Hamlet is unable to stab Claudius while at prayer. His reasons for not doing so are far more sinister than David's. He not only wants his uncle dead, he wants him in hell. Being more Christian in his beliefs than David, he fears that if killed while praying the king's soul could possibly make it to purgatory and eventually ascend rather than descend. Hamlet's spirituality rationalizes that a New Testament God's judgment just might eventually favor the king in the afterlife if he repents in time. He figures that God would be less clement if the king dies while engaged in some less pious activity and decides to wait for a more condemning opportunity.

And am I then revenged,  
 To take him in the purging of his soul,  
 When he is fit and seasoned for his passage? No!  
 Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent.  
 When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,  
 Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed;  
 At gaming, Swearing, or about some act  
 That has no relish of salvation in't—  
 Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,  
 And that his soul may be as damned and black  
 As hell, whereto it goes" (Act III, iii, 84-95).



We certainly can't believe that Hamlet has a guilty conscience about desiring the demise of Claudius, but in his subconscious concern for the country, he might also consider that it would not be wise to dispatch the king with the threat of the Norwegians at hand.

Neither one of them were so careful about dispatching those who were not kings. Hamlet is not at all concerned about God's judgment concerning the eternal destiny of Polonius or Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Concerning his college friends he tells Horatio, "Why, man, they did make love to this employment, They are not near my conscience". Perhaps he feels that their deaths are in the category of unavoidable collateral damage and that Claudius is more to blame than he is. Bloom (1998) disagrees and blames Hamlet himself for the deaths of Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: "The deaths of Gertrude, Laertes, Claudius, and Hamlet himself are all caused by Claudius's "shuffling," unlike the deaths of Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Those earlier deaths can be attributed to Hamlet's murderous theatricality, to his peculiar blend of the roles of comedian and avenger. But even Claudius is not slain as an act of vengeance—only as the final entropy of the plotted shuffling" (p. 411). David didn't concern himself with collateral damage. He murdered everything that breathed when necessary. For him it wasn't a matter of the cost, but of God's will, along with a great deal of military strategy to avoid any further revenge attacks.

## **Divine Providence —more than you think**

David depended on Divine Providence for everything. He and his predecessor Saul, consulted God's will through the prophets, and "almost" always did exactly what they were told. When they failed in this, they paid dearly. When things went wrong David felt that God was angry with him personally and was punishing him, and indeed it would seem that way. Whatever the prophets Samuel or Nathan predicted was what happened. David realized that he was God's chosen. Except for the major mess up with Bathsheba and another with the census he was ordered not to carry out, he did nothing but praise God and ask to do His will, with intermittent spells of repentance when he diverged. His actual concept of Divine Providence, as well as Hamlet's, is not really that difficult to understand. For that purpose, we will go back over two hundred years and read what Sherlock says as he clarifies the concept as probably both the Israelites and Shakespeare would have understood it.

When Saul pursued David, and God delivered Saul into David's hands while he was asleep in the cave, the men of David said unto him, behold the day of which the Lord said to thee, "behold I will deliver thine enemy into thine hands, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good to thee". Here is an argument from Providence to justify David's killing Saul, whom God had so wonderfully delivered into his hands; but David did not think that Providence would justify him against a Divine Law; Providence gave him an opportunity to kill Saul, but the Divine Law forbade him to take it; for Saul was his king still, and he was his subject. "Providence had not unking'd Saul, nor made David king; that is it had not altered the relation, and therefore could not absolve him from the duties of the relation, from the duties which a subject owes to his Prince, and therefore could not justify the killing him" (Sherlock, 1753, p. 367-8).



Shakespeare has Macbeth, written in 1606 about four years after Hamlet, consider this in his soliloquy referring to murdering Duncan (Act I, 7, 78-80), “*He is here in double trust. First, I am his kinsman and his subject, strong both against the deed*”. At this moment, Providence has given Macbeth the opportunity to be rid of Duncan, but Divine Law dictates it to be wrong to take the life of God’s anointed king, and his cousin. (Not that this will stop him). Sherlock (1753) further explains,

It is vain pretence in this case to set up the Laws of God against our submission to Providence, for we do not oppose the providence of God against His Laws. The Laws of God prescribe the rules of our duty in all conditions and circumstances of our life; the Providence of God chooses our condition for us, and that directs us what Laws we are to observe, the duties we owe, and to whom; so that there is and can be no dispute about the rules of duty, the duties of all conditions and relations are fixed and certain; the only dispute that can be is this, whether when our conditions and relations are changed, they are changed by God?.....if we must submit to Providence, we must submit to the state and conditions which Providence places us in; for there is no other way of submitting to Providence” (pp. 368-9).

This is clear for David. It is also clear for Macbeth, however easily he overcomes his scruples. However, Hamlet thinks differently. He will proclaim his belief more than once, and it is this submission to Providence, not Law, that helps him face his circumstances, not without bitterness and despair but with resignation and determination to accept his guilt and his fate. Concerning the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern he chalks it up to Divine Providence above God’s Law, and tells Horatio:

Rashly, And praised be rashness for it—let us know,  
Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well  
When our deep plots do pall, and that should learn us  
There’s a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough-hew them how we will— (Act V, ii, 6-11).

He knows he must detain the toxic reign of Claudius for the future of his country, even at the loss of his life, thus also fulfilling the duty to his father. Therefore he answers Horatio’s suggestion to avoid the final fatal encounter in the following manner:

Not a whit, we defy augury. There’s a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, ‘tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now, yet it will come. The readiness is all. Since no man has aught of what he leaves what is’t to leave betimes? Let be (Act V, ii, 230-236).

The deeply religious nature of David as well as his very human failings are taken for granted. His story of personal good and evil has become part of the patrimony of humanity along with his songs of praise, and the distinction of being the ancestor of Jesus Christ. Hamlet’s religious affinity is not as obvious as it should be to most of his admirers. McClure (1922/2013) considers,

Hamlet is essentially a religious character, using that somewhat unctuous and over sentimentalized word in its broadest, best, and sanest sense. In this respect his “humanity individualized,” since



religion is man's supremest characteristic, and man everywhere is the child of God if he so wills. The religious essence of Hamlet's nature is evidenced by two facts. The first is that the language of Hamlet parallels that of the Bible, and is almost as familiar by quotation in common speech. The second is that Hamlet everywhere weighs the Divine Will against human volition, as was anciently done in Gethsemane. This is particularly true in the long soliloquies (p. 5).

That he is the greatest literary representation of "what a piece of work a man is" is not disputed. His "quintessence of dust" is very complete, and we suffer with him in his moral quandaries. Hamlet gathers us into his kingdom and unites us as his subjects just as David united the tribes of Israel and unified the kingdom with Jerusalem as capital. Hamlet's kingdom is our own. His Jerusalem is the stage.

## Conclusion

In the case of David, the imagination must relate and connect a loosely strung series of traditional historical stories originating in the reign of Solomon. Nonetheless, the minute detail with which they are told, exact numbers, emotional reactions, descriptions of height and width and breadth, plus the abundant use of dialogue ignite the imagination to form a concept of reality from which emerges a real man, a fearless leader and warrior, prone to temptation, God fearing. Murphy (2009) says of him, "It is not that history repeats itself but that all the free persons of the past are analogous to ourselves. David can be remembered and understood by us, just as Cleopatra can be understood, by our natural humanity" (p. 63).

We remember Hamlet but not exactly for the same reasons that we remember the other great historical and literary figures. Anyone who sees, or reads, or studies Hamlet perceives the inner stream of conscience that each of us experiences in our own reality. We are in his mind and we are able to follow his contrary reasoning because that is the way our own rationality works. Martin Vidart (2015) professor of Comparative Literature said of Hamlet when asked what he thought made Hamlet so charismatic: "It is universality. He is ex-temporal. It is the human condition which makes him actual. He has a soul." We find Hamlet approachable. Carlos Marroquin (2015), a young English teacher who admires Hamlet's "spirit to fight injustice" answered the same question, "His various facets make him an almost real character. You feel you can share a cup of coffee with him and have a conversation about our problems".

As with a camera, a word picture can register all of the people and events, but this picture rarely informs the person who sees it of the inner complexity that accompanies the character. Through the accounts written, both the original documents and the multitudinous analytical attempts, we have shared with David and Hamlet their joys and their sorrows, their failures and their triumphs, their sins and their virtues, their fears and their outrageous courage, their deepest secrets and their public acclamations. We have seen their minds at work. We have seen the parallel events in their stories. Shakespeare and the author of I and II Samuel do not clearly define their great characters any more than we can define ourselves. With that lack of definition comes intrigue. One became a great king and ruled for 40 years into his old age, one did not. Both leave



us mesmerized. There is a mystery about David as there is about Hamlet, as there is about every human being, something that defies complete knowledge regardless of the effort exerted to decipher their essence. This, perhaps, is the secret. These two characters communicate the mystery, not the clarity but the mist and the fog, of the individual human. This is their charisma. This is their aura of the preternatural. David has the advantage of being historically documented for over three millennia and becoming a pillar of two major religions involving billions of people. He merits everlasting fame and the good will of all humanity. *Long live the King!* Who can deny the charm of Hamlet? “We and Horatio agree to love Hamlet despite his crimes and blunders, and despite his cruelty. We forgive him because we have to forgive ourselves. We are Hamlet—the theater is the mind.” Bloom (1998). *Long live the Prince!*

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