

THE SIGNIFICANCE AND POSITIONS OF POISON IN SHAKESPEARE'S *HAMLET'S* PLOT

By: Sekar Murbarani
 Yogyakarta State University
sekarmurbaa03@yahoo.com

Abstract

This research has two objectives. The first is to reveal the significance of poison in *Hamlet's* plot. The second is to show the positions of poison's emergences in *Hamlet's* plot. This research applies New Criticism theory. The researcher used qualitative analysis. This research's main data were expressions in dialogues taken from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. According to qualitative analysis, the technique that the researcher used to analyze the data was textual analysis. This is a technique of identifying and interpreting the verbal and non verbal signs of the text. That statement signified the relation between the author and the readers was allowed to interpret the story. The main instrument of this research was the researcher herself. To enhance trustworthiness of the data, triangulation was applied. The first result of this research is poison in *Hamlet's* plot has three significance, they are setting-up the plot, triggering confrontation, and being the "solution" of the problems. The second result shows the poison's emergences in each act of the plot. Those acts are exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement. The number of poison's emergences in each act is quite different. Poison appears once in the exposition, once in the climax, twice in the falling action, and four times in the denouement.

Keywords: New Criticism, significance of poison, positions of poison, plot, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

INTRODUCTION

In this era, young generation's interests about reading are beginning to decline. Most of them have an opinion that reading is a boring activity. Movies, videos on YouTube, and social media on their gadget are more interesting than books. Sometimes the young generation forgets a proverb "book is a window to the world". The young generation has to know that books can give them anything about what they want to know and what they need.

The weakening of reading is visible moreover towards classical works. By seeing at the phenomena that exist today, the classical works begin to be abandoned by the young generation and to be replaced by contemporary literary works. The contemporary literary works can attract the attention of the young generation more than the classical works. They have easier

language, mild conflict, and more fantasies which the classical works are lack of. There are so many contemporary literary works that are favored by the young generation, for example, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* which is categorized as "Teachers' Top 100 Books for Children" by National Education Association in 2007 and Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* which wins Golden Duck Award in 2009 for teen fiction category.

There are so many classical works whose existence is shifted by the emergence of the contemporary literary works; some of them are Shakespeare's works. The reasons why Shakespeare's works begin to be forgotten by young generation are because of its early modern English and its long narration. As the readers know, Shakespeare's works use the early modern English, for example, "thou", "thee", and "thysself" which sometimes for common readers are difficult to be understood.

Those matters affect young generation to choose to literary works which have easy language, not too much words, and colorful pictures. The researcher belongs to young generation, but those reasons do not apply to her. Basically, the researcher's analysis is evidence to young generation that there are still attractive sides of Shakespeare's works. Even though Shakespeare's works begin to be abandoned by young generation, his name always has a place in people's mind to answer a question "who is the greatest writer in literature?"

By looking at the poison in Shakespeare's plays, the researcher feels challenged to analyze it. The researcher has curiosity about poison when she learned about Shakespeare's plays in Introduction to Drama course. The researcher sees that Shakespeare has interest in using poison to reach the peak of art for his plays. Thus, he fastens poison not only in one play, but also in some of his plays. There are three famous plays of Shakespeare which use poison as the important element. They are *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Hamlet*.

Through this research, the researcher wants to explore the significance and positions of poison in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*'s plot by using New Criticism theory. The decision to use the New Criticism theory as a basic methodology for text analysis is not as simple as it may arise at first glimpse. It is caused by the fact that New Criticism is not a single approach but kind of a variety of approaches, each having its characteristic concern (Abrams, 1981: 11). Even though each of them has characteristic concern, they can unite under the umbrella of literary criticism which focuses on the text itself.

The focus of the text can be divided into two kinds: affective fallacy and intentional fallacy. The affective fallacy discusses the text

with its affects, while the intentional fallacy discusses the text with its origins. That statement is affirmed by Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson's arguments in their book entitled *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (1993) about the intentional fallacy and the affective fallacy of Wimsatt and Beardsley. They have statements (1993: 17) that the intentional fallacy is a judging process of a text based on the author's aim and the affective fallacy represents confusion between the poem and its results (what it is and what it does).

According to a play, this theory denies the extrinsic elements of a play, such as author's life or historical background. The text is more important than anything. Those statements are affirmed by René Wellek (1978: 611) that a literary work is free from any effects in its social background or from any connection with its author. Therefore, New Criticism tends to analyze the intrinsic elements of a play.

The only way to understand and to dig the depth of the work's meaning is by close reading. Tyson (1999: 119) has a statement that New Criticism and close reading are quite well connected. By doing the close reading, the readers can realize that the literary works have important sides which are worthy to be appreciated and to be noted.

The definition of close reading is the interpreting process conducted by close attention to every detail parts of the text. It is affirmed by a statement from the researcher of narrative criticism in 2005. He states that "the detailed analysis of the complex interrelations and ambiguities (multiple meanings) of the verbal and figurative components within a work" (Resseguie, 2005: 24). There are some effects that can happen when the close reading is conducted, one of them is ambiguity. According to Tyson (2014: 134), the

ambiguities which appear in the readers' mind when the close reading occurs are considered a source of richness, profound, and complexity that is added to the value of the text. Close reading makes the readers more sensitive to understand the work and makes the readers' experiences richer when reading the work.

Considering that New Criticism focuses on analyzes the formal or the intrinsic elements in literary works by doing a close reading. This theory becomes the "knife" of analysis to reveal the depth meaning of the plot and what events that form the plot in a story. According to Forster (1985: 87), plot is the continuity of events which affects other events through the basis cause and effect in a story.

Sometimes, the establishment of plot in a story is also because of the incidents. For example, Rapunzel braids her hair in order to make the prince can climb to her window. This event is transformed from incident to plot. It happens because the basis of cause and effect. The cause is Rapunzel braids her hair and the effect is the prince can climb to Rapunzel's window and can meet her. Dibell (1999: 6) states that "Cause and effect: that's what makes plot." Thus, the event of braiding hair is not only a usual scene, but also as an important intermediary to the next events.

Aristotle argues that plot becomes the most important element than characters in a play. In *The Poetics* (1951: 8), Aristotle states that "the plot is underlying principle of play." It is mean that plot is the structure of the events. Each event should be as a structure which relates to one another.

In New Criticism, to analyze plot is not only reading the plot, but also reading the structure of the plot. The structure that is related to plot can be called as Five-acts structure. The expert who initiates this concept of plot is Freytag. Therefore, this concept is

also called as Freytag's Pyramid. Freytag's concept focuses on ancient Greek and Shakespearean drama. Based on the Freytag's Pyramid, a play's plot is divided into five acts: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement.

THE RESEARCH METHOD

A researcher has to create a research design to make the research becomes credible and scientific. This research used qualitative research design. The reason why qualitative research design is more applicable is this research does not related to calculations and measurements.

The primary data of this research came from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* published in London, 1599. The data provided by this play were some characters' significant expressions which consist of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. These significant expressions associated with the revelations of poison's significance and positions of poison's emergences toward plot presented in the play.

The primary instrument of this qualitative research is the researcher herself. As the secondary instrument, the researcher used the table list to help her during the process of collecting data. The researcher used seven steps to analyze the data. The steps that the researcher used were: (1) reading and rereading Shakespeare's *Hamlet* comprehensively, (2) marking and noting any significant expressions such as words, phrases, clauses, and sentences that related to the significance of poison and the positions of poison's emergences toward plot, (3) identifying, writing down, and selecting the suitable data, (4) classifying the suitable data based on the categories, (5) reducing the data to choose the most representative data, (6) analyzing and interpreting the data, and (7) developing the data.

To obtain the trustworthiness in this research, the researcher used triangulation technique to examine the quality and the worthiness of the data that were collected by the researcher. In this research, the researcher was helped by external observers and the researcher's thesis supervisor. Those external observers facilitated the researcher by giving some feedbacks and suggestions in peer-reading process. Then, the topics of this research that the researcher discussed with her thesis supervisor were the theory, data, content, and results.

THE RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher finds that in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* there are three significance of poison in *Hamlet's* plot. They are: setting-up the plot, triggering confrontation, and being the "solution" of the problems. Besides, the researcher also finds four of five acts that become the place for poison to emerge in *Hamlet's* plot formation. Those acts are exposition, climax, falling action, and denouement. These data are divided into two tables which are explained further in the following.

The Significance of Poison in *Hamlet's* Plot

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the most successful play in Elizabethan period. The success of *Hamlet* is supported by elements which support it. One of the elements which give big impacts for the plot in *Hamlet* is poison. Poison has its own roles in influencing the plot. The important roles that poison has in *Hamlet* are setting-up the plot, triggering confrontation, and being the "solution" of the problems.

According to the uses of poison in the play's plot, the researcher found that there are

three significance of poison in *Hamlet*. The researcher classified these significance of poison into one category. It is roles. Yet, to make the analysis clearer and more comprehensible, the researcher then categorized roles into three subcategories, they are: setting-up the plot, triggering confrontation, and being the "solution" of the problems.

Setting-up the Plot

The foundation of the conflicts in *Hamlet* is marked by the Ghost's confession to Hamlet about who he is and how he dies. Here is the datum which proves how Hamlet's father is killed and who kills him:

GHOST: "I am thy father's spirit...Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder...The serpent that did sting thy father's life now wears his crown...Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole, with juice of cursed hebenon in a vial, and in the porches of my ears did pour the leperous distilment...a suddenvigour doth posset and curd, like eager droppings into milk, the thin and wholesome blood: so did it mine; and a most instant tetterbark'd about, most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust, all my smooth body..."
(Shakespeare, 1599: 28-30, Act I. Scene 5)

It can be seen from Ghost's confession that the murderer is Hamlet's uncle named King Claudius. He kills Hamlet's father by pouring a poison named hebenon into Hamlet's father's ears. That kind of poison gives bad impacts for Hamlet's father that eventually makes him die. The main reason why King Claudius kills Hamlet's father is that he wants to seize Hamlet's father's throne. The clues

that can be taken from that utterances are the bold words.

Besides, the Ghost also directly admits to Hamlet that he is Hamlet's father spirit. It can be seen from the bold sentence "**I am thy father's spirit**". The first curiosity of the reader has been answered. From those data, the dynamic plot begins to take shape. This is proved by some important events which emerge from scene 1 that give other impacts until scene 5.

By seeing that event, poison brings big significance for *Hamlet's* plot. From its appearance, poison can make some significant events which affect each other and cannot be separated. The use of poison sets up the plot. Even though there are some events which happen before poison comes, the great foundation for the next events is the use of poison. It becomes the trigger of the conflicts in this play.

From all those explanations, it can be concluded that the appearance of poison in *Hamlet* becomes more dynamic. Its appearance is the great foundation for the conflicts in this play. A bit tension also begins to emerge in this starting line of the story. Each event that happens in this beginning of the play gives its own meaning. Thus, poison has significantly important roles as the "player" for the characters and as the trigger of the conflicts. The quality of its appearance is very influential for *Hamlet's* plot.

Triggering Confrontation

Referring to poison which is used in *Hamlet*, the result of its first role stops at Hamlet who wants to take revenge on King Claudius who has killed his father. In his utterances, Hamlet says that he wants to set a drama which depicts his father's death. He also wants to ascertain whether what the Ghost

has said is true or not. There is still doubt in Hamlet's mind.

The first tension from the reader's doubt in this second role is showed by the first scene of the drama. This drama entitled *Murder of Gonzago*. The first scene of the drama will answer the reader's curiosity about what kind of drama that Hamlet prepares. The datum that shows the first tension of Hamlet's plan can be seen below:

The dumb-show enters

...she, seeing him asleep, leaves him.

Anon comes in a fellow, takes off his crown, kisses it, and pours poison in the King's ears, and exit. The Queen returns; finds the King dead, and makes passionate action. **The Poisoner, with some two or three Mutes, comes in again, seeming to lament with her.** The dead body is carried away. **The Poisoner woos the Queen with gifts: she seems loath and unwilling awhile, but in the end accepts his love.** (Shakespeare, 1599: 72, Act III. Scene 2)

Those scenes are depiction of how Hamlet's father dies. The characters in that drama play the same role with the characters in reality. Those characters are: Anon or the Poisoner as King Claudius, the King as Hamlet's father, and the Queen as Queen Gertrude. The scenes played by those three characters are similar to what the Ghost conveys to Hamlet.

The second tension that the reader faces in this role is Hamlet's success in revealing King Claudius' crime. After the reader knows how Hamlet presents the drama, the tensions that the reader has got in this plot are increasing. Even though the confrontation moment is like the "bomb" in the middle of the plot, there are "lighters" which can make the "bomb" explode. The drama that Hamlet has showed is one of the "lighters". Then, the scene that

becomes the “bomb” in this part is King Claudius’ reaction toward the drama. His reaction is the key of Hamlet’s success in revealing King Claudius’ crime.

The key to answer Hamlet’s doubts about his uncle’s crime is on his uncle’s reaction. The datum that represents Hamlet’s uncle’s reaction toward the drama: “**Give me some light: away!**” (Shakespeare, 1599: 76, Act III. Scene 2). King Claudius’ utterances represent his anger toward the scene in the drama that depicts his crime. It can be seen from his word “...**away!**” that shows he is angry. King Claudius stops the drama in the middle of the show because he feels offended and oppressed. The anger that is depicted by King Claudius answers Hamlet’s doubts. His anger is also the part of the peak of the confrontation between him and Hamlet.

According to the confrontation moment which is the peak of the conflict, King Claudius’ reaction is the “bomb” part in this play. All doubts that the reader feels about Hamlet’s father’s death are answered in this scene. The tensions which are felt by the reader slightly decreased. Significantly, the importance of poison gives the effects for each event in the story and for the enhancement of the tensions that the reader feels. Those tensions also have connection with the dynamism of the plot. The poison also has significant roles as the trigger of the confrontation between Hamlet and King Claudius. Thus, the dynamic plot in *Hamlet* which is triggered by poison is increasingly formed. Although the appearance of poison in this part is only as re-depiction about what should happen in the beginning of the play, its appearance and the events that it caused in this part are the key or the source for the whole story.

Being the “Solution” of the Problems

The last significance of poison which exists in this play is being the “solution” of the problems. After all the conflicts that happen in *Hamlet*, poison also has a role as the solver for the problems that the characters have. The reasons why the uses of poison are considered as the “solution” of the problems is marked by the act of each character. The characters use poison to eliminate their opponent and to commit suicide. Suicide action is done by the characters to immediately solve the problems encountered.

The occurrence of the duel between Hamlet and Laertes is based on King Claudius’ idea. According to the processes of solving the problems, King Claudius has an idea which is the way to solve his problems. His problems are the crime that he has been committed and it is revealed by Hamlet, then he feels oppressed about that. Here is the datum which shows King Claudius’ idea:

KING CLAUDIUS: “...set a double varnish on the fame the Frenchman gave you, **bring you in fine together and wager on your heads: he, being remiss, most generous and free from all contriving, will not peruse the foils; so that, with ease, or with a little shuffling, you may choose a sword unbated**, and in a pass of practise requite him for your father...**if this should fail...therefore this project should have a back or second**...when in your motion you are hot and dry—as make your bouts more violent to that end—and that he calls for drink, **I’ll have prepared him a chalice for the nonce, whereon but sipping**, if he by chance escape your venom’d stuck, our purpose may hold there.” (Shakespeare, 1599: 113, Act IV. Scene 7)

It can be seen from King Claudius' utterances that he has plans to kill Hamlet. His plans show that King Claudius has a role as the executor for his problem solving. His action is supported by poison. Therefore, it is clear that King Claudius really wants to release himself from the complicated problems that he faces.

King Claudius' plans are also supported by Laertes. Actually, King Claudius' and Laertes' problem with Hamlet is almost same. Their problem is losing something very important for their life. King Claudius loses his pride and Laertes loses his beloved father. To solve his problem, Laertes also has a plan to "get rid of" Hamlet. The datum that shows Laertes' plan: "...I'll anoint my sword. I bought an unction of a mountebank, so mortal that, but dip a knife in it...if I gall him slightly, it may be death." (Shakespeare, 1599: 113-114, Act IV. Scene 7). It can be seen from those two bold sentences that Laertes will smear his sword with poisonous oil. He also has a role as executors for his problem solving.

Based on the duel between Hamlet and Laertes, the tensions in *Hamlet's* plot are increasing. The emergence of the tensions also makes *Hamlet's* plot more dynamic. This duel makes the reader feels nervous and curious about what will happen with these three men. However, unsuccessfulness is in King Claudius' side. The poisonous liquid that he has prepared is precisely drunk by Queen Gertrude. The datum that shows King Claudius' second plan is not successful:

QUEEN GERTRUDE: "He's fat, and scant of breath. Here, Hamlet, take my napkin, rub thy brows; **the queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet.**"

KING CLAUDIUS: "**Gertrude, do not drink.**"

QUEEN GERTRUDE: "I will, my lord; I pray you, pardon me."

KING CLAUDIUS: (*Aside*) "**It is the poison'd cup:** it is too late." (Shakespeare, 1599: 137, Act V. Scene 2)

She knows that King Claudius will poison Hamlet with that drink. Then, to save her son's life, Queen Gertrude sacrifices her life. From that scene, the reader's tensions increase. Therefore, that matter is supported by Queen Gertrude's death because of the poisonous liquid and Hamlet's anger toward King Claudius over his mother's death. The datum that strengthens the enhancement of the reader's tension can be seen below:

LAERTES wounds HAMLET; then in scuffling, they change rapiers, and HAMLET wounds LAERTES.

QUEEN GERTRUDE: (*falls*) "No, no, the drink, the drink,--**O my dear Hamlet,--the drink, the drink! I am poison'd.**" (*Dies*)

HAMLET stabs KING CLAUDIUS

HAMLET: "Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane, **drink off this potion.** Is thy union here? **follow my mother.**"

KING CLAUDIUS dies. Then, LAERTES dies (Shakespeare, 1599: 139, Act V. Scene 2)

It can be seen from the bold utterances that Queen Gertrude tells Hamlet about the poisonous liquid that Hamlet does not know before. Starting from there, Hamlet's anger to King Claudius is increasingly peaking. His anger is shown by killing King Claudius. He wants King Claudius to feel what his mother feels. Thus, similar with King Claudius and Laertes, Hamlet becomes the executor for his problem solving. His problem is he has revenge on King Claudius. The action of these

three men is appropriate with what they should do in solving their problems. They find the solution for their problems.

Finally, the important characters in this play are all dead. Queen Gertrude dies because of the poisonous liquid; King Claudius dies because of the poisonous liquid and the stab wounds; and Laertes dies because of the stab wounds in the duel. Then, the reader might ask about Hamlet's fate. According to Shakespearean tragedy, the important characters' fate will die. The death which is faced by the characters forms an important meaning of tragedy. That statement is proved by the last scenes in *Hamlet*. Hamlet is the most important character in this play. He also belongs to that fate that leads to death. Here is the datum that shows Hamlet's death:

HAMLET: "I am dead, Horatio...As thou'rt a man, give me the cup: let go; by heaven, I'll have't. O good Horatio, what a wounded name, things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me! If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart absent free from felicity awhile, and in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain, to tell my story. O I die, Horatio; the potent poison quite o'er-crows my spirit..." (*Dies*) (Shakespeare, 1599: 140, Act V. Scene 2)

It can be seen from the first bold sentence that Hamlet is dying because of the stab wounds from Laertes' sword that has been smeared with poisoned oil. However, to speed his death and to solve all the problems that he faces in his life, Hamlet drinks the same poisonous liquid as his mother and his uncle. Then, Hamlet follows his mother, his uncle, and Laertes to death. In this scene, King Claudius and Laertes use poison to kill Hamlet; Hamlet and Queen Gertrude use poison to commit suicide. Therefore, one of

the significance of poison which is highly considered is being the "solution" of the problems.

From those all events that happened in *Hamlet*, it can be concluded that poison is very important. Poison has high quality toward the connection between the characters and the connection with the conflicts that appear in *Hamlet*. That quality is proved by some important events which appear. For example, the murder of Hamlet's father because of King Claudius' desire to become the king of Denmark, the action of mutual revenge between Hamlet, King Claudius, and Laertes, the sacrifice of Queen Gertrude to save her son's life, and many more. If poison does not appear or is not used or even the position of its use moves, the movement of the plot and the intensity of its appearance may be different. For example, if the poisonous liquid that King Claudius has prepared is successfully drunk by Hamlet not by Queen Gertrude, Hamlet will die instantly. Then, the conflicts between King Claudius, Laertes, and Hamlet finished instantly. This matter leads to an anticlimax in the story and deviates from the rules of tragedy. In tragedy, the most influential character is usually the character that dies last. Also, there are some unresolved issues such as Hamlet's revenge to his uncle and Laertes' revenge to Hamlet. Besides, if those unresolved issues occur, the reader will feel disappointed. They get what they do not expect. Therefore, poison is significantly important for the dynamics in Hamlet's plot and for its roles in each event. Its quality is strongly considered. It can be concluded that the change in the use of poison can give a significant impact for the whole story.

The Positions of Poison in Shakespeare's *Hamlet's* Plot

The researcher found there are eight emergences of poison in *Hamlet's* plot. To answer the second objective, the analysis is going deeper and further. This second objective consists of the acts that become the positions of poison's emergences in *Hamlet's* plot. To make the analysis more obvious and apprehensible, the data divide the positions into five act categories. They are: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement.

Exposition

In general, poison is regarded as trivial thing in *Hamlet*. People only focus on big issue such as Hamlet's love story or Hamlet's psychology. Besides, that big issue can appear because of the thing that is regarded trivial, namely poison. Here is the datum that shows poison in *Hamlet's* exposition:

GHOST: "...The serpent that did **sting** thy father's life now wears his crown...Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole, with **juice of cursed hebenon** in a vial, and in the porches of my ears did pour the leperous distilment...a sudden vigour doth posset and curd, like eager droppings into milk, the thin and wholesome blood: so did it mine; and **a most instant tetterbark'd about, most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust**, all my smooth body..." (Shakespeare, 1599: 29-30, Act I. Scene 5)

It can be seen that the emergence of poison in Ghost's utterances are indicated by the bold words "**juice of cursed hebenon**". Actually, that Ghost's utterances are just the representative about what happen to him in the

past. Before the meeting between Hamlet and Ghost, there is a murder in Danish kingdom. The murderer is King Claudius and the victim is Hamlet's father. This Ghost is the embodiment of Hamlet's father who has died.

Rising Action

After Hamlet knows his father's murderer, he wants to take revenge on the murderer who is his uncle. The desire for revenge is what appears as the result of the Ghost's recognition in exposition. Here is the datum that shows Hamlet's plan to take revenge on King Claudius:

HAMLET: "...That I, the son of a dear father murder'd, promoted to my revenge by heaven and hell...**I'll have these players play something like the murder of my father before mine uncle: I'll observe his looks; I'll tent him to the quick: if he but blench, I know my course. The spirit that I have seen may be the devil...**the play 's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king." (Shakespeare, 1599: 59-60, Act II. Scene 2)

It can be seen from the bold sentences that Hamlet has a plan to make a drama performance that represent his father's death. He wants King Claudius' crime is revealed in front of all royal residents. The revenge which is done by Hamlet is also a request from the Ghost. The Ghost says that "Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder." (Shakespeare, 1599: 29, Act I. Scene 5). That is the datum that shows the Ghost's request about revenge.

Climax

According to *Hamlet*, the climax is proved by the drama performance that Hamlet has prepared. In rising action, there is a little bit explanation about what kind of drama that Hamlet wants to show to the royal residents. However, in climax, it is more about how the

story is and what kind of reactions that King Claudius shows toward this drama. Here is the datum that shows the story of the drama which is the depiction of Hamlet's father's death and the emergence of poison:

The dumb-show enters

...she, seeing him asleep, leaves him. **Anon comes in a fellow, takes off his crown, kisses it, and pours poison in the King's ears, and exit.** The Queen returns; finds the King dead, and makes passionate action. **The Poisoner, with some two or three Mutes, comes in again, seeming to lament with her.** The dead body is carried away. **The Poisoner woos the Queen with gifts: she seems loath and unwilling awhile, but in the end accepts his love.** (Shakespeare, 1599: 72, Act III. Scene 2)

It can be seen from the bold sentences that there are similarity between *Murder of Gonzago* and the real story of Hamlet's father's death. The main similarity is the use of poison. The use of poison in that drama is also conducted in the same way, which is poured into the King's ears. It is clear that Hamlet wants to reveal his uncle's crime in a different way.

The main target of that drama performance is King Claudius. He gives reactions toward that drama which satisfy Hamlet. His reaction becomes the effect from the drama performance. King Claudius is offended and angry. Those feelings arise because of his fear toward his crime that has been revealed. Therefore, King Claudius stops the drama in the middle of its performance. In showing his anger, King Claudius states that "...Give me some light: away!" (Shakespeare, 1599: 76, Act III. Scene 2). King Claudius' reactions are the climax action in this act. His action in stopping the drama shows Hamlet's

success in revealing his uncle's crime. Then, another effect from the drama performance is King Claudius' plan to send Hamlet to England. King Claudius wants to prevent Hamlet from other acts that threatened him.

Falling Action

The emergences of poison in falling action become increasingly important. After some issues which wake since the exposition until the climax, in falling action, those issues begin to be solved. The instrument which is used by the characters to solve their issues or problems is poison. Poison in falling action is categorized as the solver of the issues or problems. Because of its role, the emergences of poison are more than once. Its emergences are raised by different characters. Here is the datum that shows the emergences of poison in falling action to start troubleshooting:

KING CLAUDIUS: "...set a double varnish on the fame the Frenchman gave you, bring you in fine together and wager on your heads: he, being remiss, most generous and free from all contriving, will not peruse the foils; so that, with ease, or with a little shuffling, you may choose a sword unbated, and in a pass of practise requite him for your father...**if this should fail...therefore this project should have a back or second...**when in your motion you are hot and dry—as make your bouts more violent to that end—and that he calls for drink, **I'll have prepared him a chalice for the nonce, whereon but sipping,** if he by chance escape your venom'd stuck, our purpose may hold there." (Shakespeare, 1599: 113, Act IV. Scene 7)

King Claudius' problem is the unfolding of the crime that he has committed. That disclosure

is done by Hamlet. Therefore, King Claudius has plans to take revenge on Hamlet. His revenge action is the way to solve his problem. He wants to kill Hamlet. King Claudius feels threatened by Hamlet. Because of Hamlet, King Claudius loses his pride. The emergence of poison in King Claudius' plan can be seen from the second bold sentence. He prepares a poisonous liquid which is planned to be drunk by Hamlet when the break time of the duel.

Besides King Claudius, there is Laertes who also has problem with Hamlet. Laertes' problem is losing two people he love, his father and his sister. The death of his father and his sister is caused by Hamlet. Same with King Claudius, Laertes also has a plan to take revenge on Hamlet. He belongs to the sword match that has been planned by King Claudius. That sword match opens Laertes' opportunity to kill Hamlet. However, poison becomes a complement for Laertes to kill Hamlet. Here is the datum that shows Laertes' plan in using poison: LAERTES: "...I'll **anoint my sword. I bought an unction of a mountebank**, so mortal that, but **dip a knife in it...if I gall him slightly, it may be death.**" (Shakespeare, 1599: 113-114, Act IV. Scene 7). It can be seen from the bold sentence that Laertes has bought poisonous oil. He will smear that poisonous oil on his sword that he uses in the duel. The emergence of poison in Laertes' part becomes more important in solving a problem between the characters. Even though there is sword, Laertes adds poison on it.

Denouement

In denouement, the function and the emergences of poison become more real. Those matters are proved by the function of poison as the problem solver which is not only as a plan, but also has been completely done or used. Therefore, the emergences of poison

in denouement are doubled than in falling action. The first data that shows the emergences of poison in denouement is:

QUEEN GERTRUDE: "He's fat, and scant of breath. Here, Hamlet, take my napkin, rub thy brows; the queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet."

KING CLAUDIUS: "**Gertrude, do not drink.**"

QUEEN GERTRUDE: "I will, my lord; I pray you, pardon me."

KING CLAUDIUS: (*Aside*) "**It is the poison'd cup: it is too late.**" (Shakespeare, 1599: 137, Act V. Scene 2)

It can be seen from the bold sentences that the poisonous liquid that King Claudius has prepared for Hamlet in falling action is drunk by Queen Gertrude. In those events, the function of poison for King Claudius as the problem solver is not functioning properly because his plan is not right on target.

The emergence of poison in those events gives the impact for the next event. That impact is felt by Queen Gertrude and Hamlet. Queen Gertrude dies because of that poisonous liquid. It is proved by her words before she dies:

LAERTES wounds HAMLET; then in scuffling, they change rapiers, and HAMLET wounds LAERTES.

QUEEN GERTRUDE: (*falls*) "No, no, the drink, the drink,--**O my dear Hamlet,--the drink, the drink! I am poison'd.**" (*Dies*) (Shakespeare, 1599: 139, Act V. Scene 2)

It can be seen from the bold sentence that she is dying because of that poisonous liquid. She tries to save Hamlet from King Claudius' second crime which wants to kill Hamlet. However, Queen Gertrude's death increases Hamlet's desire to take revenge on King

Claudius. Here is the third data that shows Hamlet takes revenge on King Claudius:

HAMLET stabs KING CLAUDIUS

HAMLET: “Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane, **drink off this potion**. Is thy union here? **follow my mother**.”

KING CLAUDIUS dies. Then, LAERTES dies (Shakespeare, 1599: 139, Act V. Scene 2)

From the bold words in Hamlet’s utterances and the first words in italics, it shows that Hamlet uses two ways to take revenge on King Claudius. He uses sword and poisonous liquid to kill his uncle. In these events, the emergence of poison as the problem solver applies on Hamlet.

Even though King Claudius is failed in using poison to kill Hamlet, Laertes is the man who succeeds on it. Laertes’ success is proved by the words in italics above *LAERTES wounds HAMLET*. Laertes succeeds to stab Hamlet with his sword that has been smeared with poisonous oil. This proves that the emergence of poison as the problem solver applies on Laertes too. Laertes’ action gives the impact for Hamlet’s condition which requires him to hasten his death by drinking the poisonous liquid which is trace. Here is the last data that shows the emergences of poison in denouement:

HAMLET: “**I am dead, Horatio...As thou’rt a man, give me the cup: let go; by heaven, I’ll have’t**. O good Horatio, what a wounded name, things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me! If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart absent free from felicity awhile, and in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain, to tell my story. **O I die, Horatio; the potent**

poison quite o’er-crows my spirit: I cannot live to hear the news from England; 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.” (*Dies*) (Shakespeare, 1599: 140, Act V. Scene 2)

The bold sentences show that Hamlet drinks the poisonous liquid which is also drunk by Queen Gertrude and King Claudius. By drinking that poisonous liquid, Hamlet puts an end to all the problems in his life. His revenge has been repaid and his duty in the kingdom is over. Therefore, he chooses Prince Fortinbras to become the new king of Denmark.

CONCLUSION

Poison is significantly important in *Hamlet’s* plot. Its significance are showed in its three roles. Those three roles are setting-up the plot, triggering confrontation, and being the “solution” of the problems. For setting-up the plot, poison becomes the foundation for the conflicts that happen in this play. Then, poison triggers the confrontation between King Claudius and Hamlet. The last, poison is used by the characters as the “solution” for them to solve all the problems that they have.

There are four of five acts in the formation plot where poison takes position. Those four acts are in the exposition, climax, falling action, and denouement. Actually, after exposition is rising action, but poison does not appear in it. Rising action is only the place for the effects of the emergence of poison in exposition. In the exposition, poison only emerges once. It can be seen from the Ghost’s confession about King Claudius who kills Hamlet’s father by pouring poison in Hamlet’s father ears. The reason of his action is he wants to seize the throne of Denmark

kingdom. Even though in rising action there is no the emergence of poison, the impact of poison that emerges in exposition exists in this act. That impact is Hamlet's plan to take revenge on King Claudius. He prepares a drama performance which has the same story with what King Claudius and his father experience. That plan happens in climax. In this act, poison emerges only once too. It emerges in re-depiction of the murder of Hamlet's father. The climax from the emergence of poison is King Claudius' reaction toward the drama performance. He feels angry and threatened. Those indicate that Hamlet succeeds in taking revenge on his uncle. Then, the next act is falling action. Poison emerges twice in this act. The first is in King Claudius' plan to kill Hamlet with poisonous liquid. The second is in Laertes' plan to kill Hamlet with his sword which is smeared with poisonous oil. In this act, poison begins to be the solver of the conflicts. The last act is denouement. The emergences of poison in denouement are four times. Those are marked by Queen Gertrude who drinks the poisonous liquid that should be drunk by Hamlet, King Claudius who is forced by Hamlet to drink the same poisonous liquid as his mother drank, Laertes who stabs Hamlet with his sword which has been smeared with poisonous oil, and Hamlet who also drinks the poisonous liquid to hasten his death. All of those characters finally die. They have succeeded to wreak their revenge. However, no one is a winner in this play.

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