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**Semiotic Elements on William Shakespeare's
*Hamlet Prince of Denmark***

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Abstract

This article analysis *Hamlet Prince of Denmark*, a tragic drama written by William Shakespeare. The purpose of this study is to finding out basic narrative scheme, prime signifier and paradigmatic and syntagmatic aspects of the drama. The approaches that I used is semiotics and close reading. The result shows that the narration centered on a binary opposition, hesitated revenge being the prime signifier, and paradigmatic and syntagmatic revealed details of the signals. Based on the analyses, William Shakespeare's *Hamlet Prince of Denmark* contain prime signifier

Keywords: semiotic; signifier; paradigmatic; syntagmatic.

1. Introduction

Semiotics is the science of signs (Wardoyo, 2005:1), which may contain meaningful words or figures. The signalling process result in vary meaning among individuals, depending upon mental concept each individuals perceives toward them. Therefore, a universal interpretation of a particular text is unlimited.^[1]

Wardoyo (2005:5) said that a series of signals can be structured in codes in two ways, paradigmatic and syntagmatic. Paradigmatic deals with classification of signals or a series of signal, which become part of a particular category. Whereas, syntagmatic refers to a combination of interaction between the signals that are regulated to construct a holistic meaning.^[2]

Using such understanding, the author presented an analysis of *Hamlet Prince of Denmark*, a tragic drama written by William Shakespeare from 1599 to 1601. This analysis aimed at finding out basic narrative scheme, prime signifier and paradigmatic and syntagmatic aspects of drama.

2. Methods

2.1 Semiotic Approach

The basis of semiotics is the sign, that is, any configuration to which there is a conventionalised response. Semiotics investigates the various systems of signs that create the shared meanings that constitute any culture (Newton, 1988).^[3]

2.2 Close Reading

Close reading is thoughtful, critical analysis of a text that focuses on significant details or patterns in order to develop a deep, precise understanding of the text's form, craft, meanings, etc.^[4]

3. Synopsis

Prince Hamlet is the protagonist in the Shakespeare's *Hamlet Prince of Denmark*. He is a prince from Denmark as well as King Claudius' nephew, who overthrew and assassinated King Hamlet I, Hamlet's father, from power. Prince Hamlet is planning to make a revenge his father's death. At the end of the tragedy, Hamlet manages to kill Claudius, Polonius, Laertes, and two of his childhood friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Prince Hamlet is also involved, albeit indirectly, in the death of his spouse, Ophelia, and the mother, Gertrude. The protagonist becomes the last character to die in the story.^[5]

4. Discussion

This study is divided into three broad analyses, i.e. basic narrative scheme, prime signifiers, and paradigmatic and syntagmatic aspects, as the following table illustrates:

Table 1 : Report analyses

Prime signifier	Signals	Signs
Hamlet's hesitation to take a revenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• King assassination• Reign overthrow• Gertrude's marriage• Hamlet's revenge• King's death• Hamlet's death	<i>"to be or not to be"</i>

4.1 Basic Narrative Scheme

As a result of paradigmatic and syntagmatic analysis, this study found the drama narrative scheme. It revealed that the narration centered on a binary opposition, that is Hamlet's hesitation to believe that what his late father told him will result in a tragic end. King Hamlet I overthrow by his successor, Claudius, and the marriage between Claudius with Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, motivates Claudius to get rid of his step son, Hamlet. Hamlet's hesitation vanishes and changes into an obsession to assassinate Claudius post his mother's death (as a result of drinking poisonous wine given by Claudius). Claudius also prepares a poisonous sword to kill Laertes. The basic narrative scheme can be structured as the following:

- Hamlet hears the voice of his late father.
- Hamlet witnesses his mother's marriage.
- Hamlet kills Polonius.
- Hamlet witnesses Gertrude's death.
- Hamlet witnesses Laertes' death
- Hamlet assassinates Claudius.
- Hamlet is assassinated by a poisonous sword from Claudius.

4.2 Prime Signifier

The prime signifier in this story is a hesitated revenge, that is, a situation that gives rises to term “*to be or not to be*”, Hamlet intends to his spouse (Ophelia), his mother (Gertrude), as well as his uncle (Claudius). Hamlet is looking for the truth to diminish his hesitation to make a revenge after hearing his late father’s spirit message. The king’s spirit keeps haunting the whole palace, demanding his son, Hamlet, to his death on the expense of Claudius.

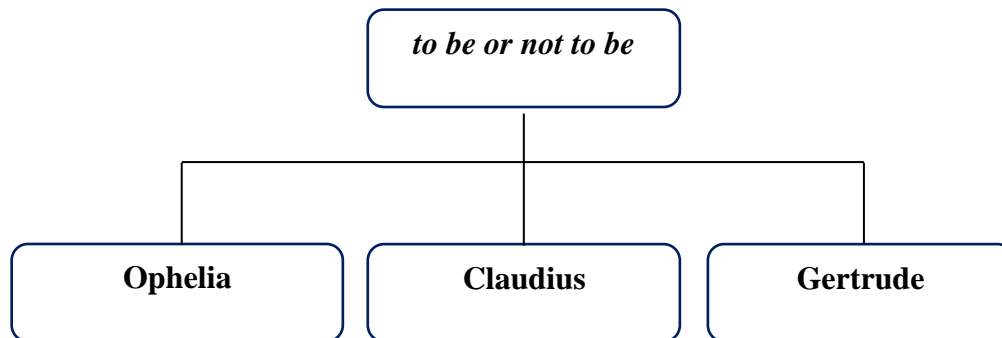


Figure 1 : Prime signifier

Prime signifier is a microcosm, of the whole love. Hence, it represents other signifiers related to Hamlet’s hesitation.

4.2.1 Hamlet’s hesitation to love Ophelia

Hamlet’s hesitation to love Ophelia by saying that he actually does not love her. Indeed, Hamlet loves Ophelia even though the lady’s father, Polonius, does not agree with their relationship. Polonius said that Hamlet can not be trusted. What he only wants just for pleasure, and therefore asking his daughter to stop seeing him. Ophelia obeys her father’s wishes (Shakespeare, 1968:58).

Hamlet insists to deny that he loves Ophelia. The death of Polonius makes Ophelia falls to mental illness. She suffers from lose one’s train of thought. During Polonius funeral ceremony, Hamlet comes down to the Polonius’ grave and says that he loves Ophelia.

Hamlet. I love Ophelia : fourty thousand brothers.
Could not, with all their quantity of love,
Make up my sum. What will thou do for her? (Shakespeare, 1968:200)

4.2.2 Hamlet’s hesitation to his mother

Hamlet’s hesitation to his mother’s faithfulness towards his father, King Hamlet I, makes him more hated to Claudius and blaming his mother as the caused of his father death. Hamlet believes that the Queen, Gertrude, having an affair with his uncle, Claudius, when his father was stil alive. The King’s spirit describes his brother, Claudius, as “that adulterate beast”. He tried to seduce the Queen with his clever words, giving fancy gifts, and persuading her to give in to his lust (Shakespeare, 1968:65).

4.2.3 Hamlet hesitation to take revenge

Hamlet hesitation to take revenge toward Claudius who has assassinated his father, makes him planning to kill Hamlet.

4.3 *Paradigmatic-Syntagmatic Signifier*

A series of signals can be structured into codes in two ways, paradigmatic and syntagmatic.

4.3.1 Paradigmatic relation

Paradigmatik adalah klasifikasi tanda-tanda yang merupakan anggota suatu kategori, (Wardoyo, 2005:6). In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the paradigmatic signals are identified by the following events:

1. Assassination of the King

There is a false rumour about the cause of the death of King Hamlet I. His death is, in fact, not caused by a snake bite. The King's spirit haunts the palace, sending a message to his son, Hamlet, about what truly happens.

Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole,
With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial,
And in the porches of mine ear did pour. (Shakespeare, 1968
:66)

2. Reign overthrow

Claudius does anything he can do to overthrow the reign. Telling everyone that the cause of the King Hamlet's death is being bitten by the snake. Everyone in Denmark was fooled. His main purpose is wearing King Hamlet's crown. Besides that, he tends to marry his sister-in-law (Shakespeare, 1968:65).

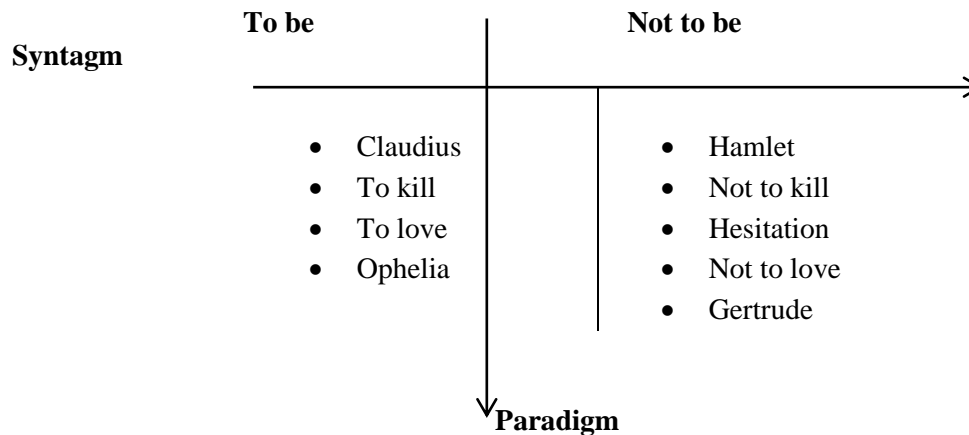
Less than two months since King hamlet has died, his widow, Gertrude marries Claudius, hurting her son, Hamlet: It is not, nor it cannot come to, good./But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue! (Shakespeare, 1968:46).

The death of Gertrude because of drinking poisoned wine by Claudius, which is initially intended to hamlet, makes Hamlet upset: Queen. No no the drink, the drink. – O my dear Hamlet,/The drink, the drink! – I'm poison'ed (Shakespeare, 1968:219). Gertrude's death creates Hamlet's hanger towards Claudius. He becomes certain that his late father's is right. He gradually forgets his anger and prepare to kill Claudius (Shakespeare, 1968:219).

4.3.2 Syntagmatic relation

Syntagm signaling is a combination of interaction between signals orderly structure in a holistic meaning. It is composed of choices of paradigm, which are conventionally considered correct, or necessary by a particular value (Wardoyo, 2005: 6). Shakespeare's *Hamlet Prince of Denmark* contains a *to be* binary opposition, i.e. the belief versus *not to be*, the hesitation. In this drama, Hamlet is the subject who intends to revenge his father's death. He becomes a reluctant subject. The objects consist of Ophelia, Gertrude, and Claudius. The binary opposition is as follow:

Table 2: Binary opposition



3. CONCLUSION

The discussion came to a conclusion that William Shakespeare's *Hamlet Prince of Denmark* contain prime signifier. It also had basic narrative structure which formed the following drama sequences:

1. Hamlet hears his late father's voice
2. Hamlet witnesses his mother's marriage
3. Hamlet kills Polonius
4. Hamlet witnesses Gertrude's death
5. Hamlet witnesses Laertes' death
6. Hamlet assassinates Claudius
7. Hamlet get assassinated by a poisonous sword prepared by Claudius

The three approaches used in this analysis resulted in the following outcomes: *firstly*, basic narrative scheme presented synopsis of the whole narrative structure; *secondly*, prime signifier analysis signalled microcosm of semiotic system of the whole text; and *thirdly*, paradigmatic and syntagmatic analysis revealed details of the signals within the text constructed by narrative structure.

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