



The Melancholy and Vain: Barack Obama's Hamlet Complex

In a recent interview with CBS's Early Show anchor, Harry Smith, former Massachusetts Governor and Republican presidential hopeful Mitt Romney compared President Obama's hesitation to announce and stick to a consistent policy in Afghanistan to Hamlet's immortal vacillations as contained in Shakespeare's poignant "To be or not to be" soliloquy:



And by the way, this Hamlet performance that we're seeing out of the White House is very, very disconcerting. The President has known about this issue [the need to partner with one or another of the various Afghan factions] for a long time. He received the report from General McChrystal what, four months ago? And has not been able to make a decision. This is very, very unfortunate for the people there and for our troops.

Well, not quite as eloquent as Shakespeare, but we get the point. Romney has settled on the "let's call the other guy indecisive" gambit. He took this from page 1 of the Political Opposition playbook. The unspoken yet understood import of this accusation is to say that if Romney had his hand on the wheel we'd roll right into Kabul and lay down the law. Maybe. There is little doubt that Obama is indecisive and his apparent inability to pull the trigger on a determined strategy must be unnerving to many whose lives are affected by what happens in Afghanistan. However, this irritating irresoluteness is only the beginning of the similarities identifiable between Barack Obama and Hamlet.

President Obama is a man who considers himself, as did Hamlet, a man of action. Neither one of them, however, has done anything other than employ others to frighten their enemies with "false fire." The behavior of both men evinces a belief that being inspiring is all it takes to be a strong leader. Unfortunately for those who genuinely look to them for direction, consistently demonstrating one's speechmaking talent is not legitimate preparation for leadership.



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on November 3, 2009

The President's conviction of his own greatness is reminiscent of that experienced by Hamlet. Despite his unchecked rage and violent outbursts, Hamlet did nothing of any real significance, unless you count making innumerable speeches, tricking those of lesser intellect, pretending to be crazy, and letting others take the blame for his ineptitude and the missteps that follow. What has President Obama done to inspire the nation's confidence? Despite his promises of "change" and well-crafted enunciations of animating themes (Hope), Barack Obama has done nothing to improve this nation. In fact, hiding behind the actions (albeit arguably treasonous and certainly unconstitutional actions) of his surrogates, he simultaneously distances himself from any ill consequences of the same and masterfully perpetuates his mythical allure as a visionary.

What is Barack Obama's vision and how has he worked to bring it to fruition? Again, although blessed with a top-notch education and rhetorical prowess, the early pages of his biography record nothing very remarkable or noteworthy. Picture Hamlet, the son of a popular king of Denmark, but what has he to show for it: lots of moving, evocative speeches; average fencing skills; and a small coterie of devoted friends that eagerly dance to his mournful tune. In all, not much. Barack Obama could have employed his gifts in the accomplishment in his youth of something that would merit the adjective "presidential," but alas we have some rousing speeches as a student, nominal charity work, and organizing protests of asbestos removal and other puny causes. Judging from the page count, President Obama has spent more time writing autobiographies than anything else.

Of course, such self-promotion is vital to the sculpting and maintenance of his image as an insightful leader and a prodigious problem-solver. Never mind that the problems he tackles and the solutions he offers are all just philosophical musings written as stories where he is always proved right in the end and mammoth difficulties are dismissed with an epigram or an anecdote. As one author put it, "When rival princelings like [Eliot] Spitzer and [Andrew] Cuomo were accumulating executives' scalps, the future President Hamlet was rehearsing his own story in a couple of bestsellers. Within their covers he could count himself a king of infinite space."

As with the young Danish prince before him, storytelling is certainly one of President Obama's hallmark strengths. It is undeniable that millions of Americans walk away from one of President Obama's speeches feeling moved, enraptured, and reassured. To President Obama, such a reaction is a victory. Once again he effectively "speechified" his way into a well-spread conception of leadership. He has "inspired the American people to rally behind a common purpose." That such hollow performances can be transformed into convincing evidence of authority and command is the core of his genius. Obama instinctively realizes that in this age of sound bites and celebrity, a man needn't be a proven leader, he need only *sound* like a proven leader. If he wants to be thought of as an FDR for the new century, he need only quote FDR. If the next day he wants to be thought of as a young, dynamic icon in the JFK mold? Act JFK-like. It is tragically simple and simply tragic.

Like Hamlet, who believes that the men around him only achieved greatness through false sincerity and mock populism, Barack Obama imagines that his tiny triumphs and Midwestern charm cover a multitude of sins. As Hamlet says in Act I, "That one may smile and smile and be a villain." If you can imagine it, you can be it. The recipe seems to have been memorized very early on by President Obama. He has a mental storeroom full of the necessary ingredients: smile broadly; toss out inspiring quips; be photographed in your shirtsleeves without a tie; appear on hip talk shows; hold "beer summits" in the back yard of the White House. Always look the part and always be ready for your close-up. Barack Obama may be a nondescript President with paltry qualifications, but he is a practiced



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thespian of chops nonpareil.

Finally, in fairness to Barack Obama and all Presidents in recent memory, they are mere players and act according to a script written in the hand of others more sinister and more corrupt. There has been in place for decades a program of globalism, financial manipulation, and constitutional enervation. President Obama is but the latest star to be put in the spotlight. While this does not absolve him of his complicity, it does perhaps explain how he came to be the so-called "leader of the free world" without ever being the leader of anything else.

As Shakespeare so rightly said, "O, reform it altogether. And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them."

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