

Hamlet's strive for revenge and his insanity

Literature, William Shakespeare



Confucius once said, “ before you embark on a journey of revenge, dig two graves”. Revenge is based on the principle that it is only fair to correct a wrong by doing another wrong. Its compelling nature causes one to act carelessly through anger rather than reason. Revenge is one of humanity’s worst flaws that ultimately just brings misery and failure to those who intend to perform it. Revenge is a major theme seen in Shakespeare’s ‘ Hamlet’. Hamlet, Laertes, and Fortinbras all share a mutual purpose to seek revenge for the murder of their fathers. All of their revenge plans are based on emotion rather than thought, which eventually leads to all of their downfalls, except for Fortinbras. All of their reasons for vengeance are the same, but each of them reacts in a way different from the other. Hamlet was assigned by his own fathers’ ghost to kill Claudius for killing him and taking his thrown. Laertes seeks to murder Hamlet for killing his father; Polonius and Fortinbras are obligated to get revenge for his father’s death by King Hamlet. In William Shakespeare’s ‘ Hamlet’ the theme of revenge reveals how human complexity can affect its outcome through the characters of Hamlet, Laertes, and Fortinbras.

Hamlet sabotaged himself with hate as he allowed it to consume his judgment. Hamlet just went through a hard time as his father; King Hamlet was murdered and his mother; Gertrude married his uncle Claudius all in the span of two months. Hamlet was in despair after the death of his father, but the thought of revenge was never an option until he meets with the ghost of his father. The ghost told him that King Claudius; his own brother, was the one who murdered him. The ghost tells Hamlet to get revenge on Claudius as he says, “ to revenge his foul and most unnatural murder”. (ACT 1 SCENE

2 LINE 25). Claudius's murder of King Hamlet initiates Hamlet's hunt for revenge. Hamlet expresses his feelings while talking with the ghost as he says, "haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift As meditation or the thoughts of love, May sweep to my revenge". (1. 5. 29-31) Hamlet is stunned by the news and is thus determined to get revenge, that he is blinded by the people around him. In order for Hamlet to take revenge, he needs to make sure he doesn't cause suspicion to himself, so he used madness to draw the attention elsewhere. His madness leads to the death of the love of his life, Ophelia. During a duel with Laertes, Hamlet gets stabbed with a poisonous sword, but Hamlet then wounds Laertes with the same sword. As well, after seeing that Claudius killed his mother with poisonous wine, he kills him right away; ultimately fulfilling his vow of revenge to the ghost. Hamlet was never a murderer, but with hate and revenge being the only thing on his mind that changed.

Laertes is justified to revenge his father's murder given that Polonius had not committed any crime for him to die in the hands of Hamlet. Once hearing about the death of his father, Laertes returned home to Denmark overwhelmed with anger and questions. The first thing he did was confront and accuse Claudius of the murder of his father. Once Laertes learns that it was Hamlet who was responsible for his father's death he was in a blind rage, and he decides to kill Hamlet to get revenge for his father. Laertes is very mad and wants a cure for the pain he is in, and this cure would be to get revenge. He does not care who he needs to kill as he says, "let come what comes, only I'll be revenged. Most thoroughly for my father" (IV, V, 133-134). Laerte's anger over the death of his father leads him to act

stupidly. He does not care about anything, or anyone but only about avenging for his family. Like Fortinbras, Laertes acts impulsively. Claudius and Laertes make a plan to kill Hamlet, and in the end, nothing good works out for anyone, and his plan for revenge ultimately leads to his own death. Laertes is taken over by madness and is blind to the fact that revenge is not the best answer. As part of his plan for revenge, he challenges Hamlet to a duel to atone for the death of his father and sister. Laertes dipped his sword in poison, so when he stabbed Hamlet, he was doomed to die. After he stabs Hamlet, Hamlet, filled with anger takes the poisoned sword and stabs Laertes back. With Laertes' search for self-satisfying revenge, he becomes naïve to the simplistic answer of justice.

Opening Sentence

King Fortinbras was killed by King Hamlet, resulting in Fortinbras being in a deep state of anger. Due to his father's death, Fortinbras wanted revenge against Denmark. In order to avenge, he wanted to go to war with Denmark over a small piece of land. Compared to Hamlet who thinks more than he says, Fortinbras acts quickly to get what he wants. His revenge is driven by honor as he wished to recover the territory that was lost when his father was murdered by King Hamlet. Horatio says, " young Fortinbras, of unimproved metal, got and full, hath in the skirts of Norway, here and there Sharked up a list of lawless resolute, for food and diet, to some enterprise That hath a stomach in't: which is no other and it doth well appear unto our state- But to recover of us by a strong hand and terms compulsory, those ' foresaid lands so by his father lost," (I. i. 95-104/ ACT 1, SCENE I, LINES 109-117) Horatio is explaining how Fortinbras wants to avenge the death of his father

by creating an army that could overpower those in Denmark. Fortinbras is a young, heartfelt man who will do anything to get revenge on those who killed his father. In the end, it is Fortinbra's immediate actions that allow him to achieve his goal without having to go under the guise of being crazy.

Revenge is a choice made by all three men and the reason behind the death of Hamlet and Laertes, and the rise of Fortinbras. In Hamlet, Shakespeare uses the idea of revenge in three different ways, via three different characters; Hamlet, Laertes, and Fortinbras. He shows how all three of them allow hate to destroy them and take over their minds. Vengeance spoils their hearts and madness captures their minds preventing them to see alternate possibilities. In the times of Hamlet, avenging for a family member was part of one's honor and therefore had to be done. Shakespeare shows how a person's desire to satisfy their own feelings, takes over their chances to make moral choices.