

The justification of revenge and unwillingness of hamlet to avenge his father's d...

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The theme of revenge keeps recurring in William Shakespeare's play, Hamlet. Most of the revenge missions that different characters in the play undertake end up in tragedy. Although Hamlet, the main character, contemplates revenging his father's murder, he considers the tragedy that will result from his actions and therefore, he tries to rescind his decision. Shakespeare portrays Hamlet as unwilling to revenge. The thoughts that the writer puts into the character's mind aim at showing the reader that Hamlet considers revenge as not the right thing. The author portrays Hamlet considering revenge as a crime that he should avoid. Shakespeare shows Hamlet thinking that revenging will make him become a beast (Kastan 113). Hamlet, however, thinks that revenging is the same as not revenging since both decisions have consequences that might haunt him. His great fear is that revenging will soil his name and failure to revenge will not give him the moral authority to try to become the new king of Denmark.

Laertes, Polonius son also tries to avenge his father's murder. Although he meets many obstacles, he succeeds in engaging in a fight with Hamlet, his father's killer. Fortinbras, the prince of Norway tries to revenge his father's death in the hands of King Hamlet. Interestingly, the prince comes out as the only survivor that does not face tragedy. Various analysts of the play have expressed different opinions regarding the justification of the revenge that different characters engage in as portrayed in the play. Some analysts claim that the revenge is justified while others say it lacks justification. Based on these distinct views and the events that precede the revenge, it is apparent that vengeance that characters undertake in Hamlet is justified.

The mental conviction that Hamlet develops shows the justification of his revenge mission. He first considers that revenging will make him leave a wounded name and legacy (Kastan 117). However, he realizes that, although revenge signifies crime, his father's killer committed the crime and therefore, failing to revenge is an indication of justifying the action of the person that killed King Hamlet. The contemplation that Hamlet undergoes reveals that failing to revenge for his father's death means allowing other people in the kingdom to kill others at will since they know that their actions will not have consequences. He says that as his father's only son, he has to "do this same villain" (Shakespeare 83). The assertion reveals that he has to punish evil with evil. Thus, Hamlet tries to act as a court of law that punishes people to send a warning to others that committing a certain crime attracts grave consequences.

Hamlet convinces himself that revenging is a mode of restoration (Kastan 112). To him, failure to revenge destroys his character and authority as a prince of Denmark. In his conversation with his father's ghost, Hamlet claims that failure to revenge will make him a "rogue and peasant slave" (Shakespeare 577). The claim is an indication that Hamlet cannot let go of his anger without revenging. He fears that failure to revenge will encourage his father's killer to turn him into a slave. The fear is a justification for revenge in that failing to do so will bring tragedy to Hamlet's life.

The need to adhere to his father's ghost justifies the revenge mission that Hamlet undertakes in the play. The ghost commands Hamlet to revenge his father's "foul and most unnatural murder" (Shakespeare 37). At first,

Hamlet is surprised that his father was murdered. As a result, he asks the ghost to clarify whether it is true that his father's death was unnatural. Interestingly, the ghost repeats that the murder was the foulest, unnatural and strange. In Denmark's society that Shakespeare writes about, obeying ancestral ghosts is seen as a show of respect for the departed souls. Hamlet is justified to obey the ghost and kill Claudius, who killed King Hamlet, the prince's father. Although Hamlet is at first convinced that he should revenge, he claims that he needs to meditate and such meditation might sweep away his thoughts of revenge (Kastan 121). He makes the claim after learning that Claudius killed his father. The ghost further reveals to Hamlet that Claudius conspired with his mother, Gertrude, to take over the leadership of the kingdom of Denmark.

Also, the threat that Claudius poses to Hamlet's dreams of becoming the king of Denmark and the disrespect he shows to the prince justifies Hamlet's move to revenge. Claudius takes over the leadership of the kingdom and goes ahead to marry Hamlet's mother, Gertrude. The ghost tells Hamlet that he should not let the "royal bed of Denmark be a couch for luxury and damned incest" (Shakespeare 87). The ghost insinuates that Gertrude is engaging in incest and that Hamlet should not accept to be ashamed of his mother's action. However, the ghost cautions Hamlet to spare his mother in his revenge mission since she will be judged by heavens. By taking over the kingdom, Claudius reduces the chances of Hamlet of becoming a king (Kastan 119). According to Prosser, Claudius overthrows protocol observed in the kingdom's leadership and therefore, Hamlet is justified to take up his

position through revenge (39). Hamlet's assertion that he is likely to become a slave in his country shows that he should revenge and face the consequences rather than waiting to be exiled and lose his chance of leading Denmark.

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. After learning that his father has been murdered, Laertes returns from France ready to ensure that justice is done. He understands that failure to revenge his father's death will encourage Hamlet to continue to kill leaders in Denmark as he tries to rule. Laertes' revenge mission is justified given that it is meant to stop Hamlet's pretentious madness that he uses to collaterally kill people. Shakespeare builds the relationship between Laertes and Hamlet in a way that justifies the anger that the former experiences after learning about his father's murder. Hamlet and Laertes are friends in the opening of the play and their friendship ends after the former kills Polonius. Hamlet's failure to kill Claudius when he sees him praying shows that he is reluctant to engage in the revenge (Kastan 111). Based on this notion, Laertes concludes that Hamlet might have willingly killed his father. He says that he has to denounce his allegiance to Hamlet and thoroughly revenge for his father. He says; " I will be revenged and will not be juggled with allegiance" (Shakespeare 149). The claims indicate that Hamlet did not show allegiance to Laertes by killing his father and that the latter is justified to defy his former friend.

In his conversation with Claudius, Laertes appears to suggest that Hamlet has caused harm to his family. For instance, Hamlet drives Ophelia crazy after he cancels their engagement. Thus, by going further and killing Polonius, Hamlet leaves Laertes with no other option rather than revenge. Laertes says that to prove his urge to protect his family, he will kill Hamlet by “cutting his throat in the church” (Shakespeare 142). However, the mission aborts when the two engage in a duel that Hamlet wins.

Fortinbras is justified to revenge given that he lost his father in the hands of Hamlet's father. Horatio describes Fortinbras as a person with “unimproved mettle hot and full” who has shaken up “lawless resolute” (Shakespeare 109). The description reveals that Fortinbras has guts to revenge his father's murder and take over Denmark. However, he chooses to withhold his revenge mission because he considers peace as more important than war.

The tragedies associated with the various revenge missions in Hamlet have been used to argue that such revenge is not justified. For instance, Hamlet kills his friend's father, Polonius as he pursues Claudius (Kastan 119). Also, Laertes' mission to kill Hamlet ends in tragedy as he gets killed in a duel. However, the reasons that those seeking revenge give justify their actions. Claudius' threat on Hamlet's move to ascend to the throne justifies the revenge mission undertaken by Hamlet. Besides, the need to stop Hamlet's murder spree justifies Laertes' revenge mission.

The recurrence of the theme of revenge in Shakespeare's Hamlet has triggered a debate on the justification of the character's vengeance. Based

on the debate, Hamlet is justified to try to kill Claudius since he learns from the ghost that his father's death was unnatural. Laertes' and Fortinbras have justification to pursue their fathers' killers since they believe that they were robbed their lives without any cause and justifiable reason.