

# Hamlets downfall stems from his inability to revenge

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Hamlet's downfall stems from his inability to vengeance. How is this foregrounded in the early parts of the play, breaking from the traditional conventions of an Elizabethan revenge disaster? It can be said that Hamlet's procrastination and failure to act lead to his eventual death. Shakespeare forewarns the audience of Hamlet's defects throughout the play, in his soliloquies and also through the exploration of the Elizabethan revenge tragedy. Throughout the Elizabethan period, it was commonplace to compose within the category of the vengeance tragedy.

This particular genre was very popular with the general public due to the themes it embodied.

Namely restoring order through punishing vice and getting individual retribution. Other functions frequently included treason, incest and the look of a ghost. Hamlet's belief in the occult and fear of damnation embodies the sensations of people at the time, "The spirit I have seen may be a devil, and the devil hath power to presume a pleasing shape ... possibly out of my weak point and my melancholy ... abuses me to damn me.

"Hamlet is unusual in that it is embedded in Denmark, a protestant nation. When analyzing vice and human failings, Shakespeare and other authors typically set their plays in catholic countries.

The factor for this being that the examination of vice in Hamlet would not seem crucial of the English court and also his ethical dilemmas would strike more of a chord with his audience. One such problem that is considered by lots of individuals is suicide. Hamlet's early reference of this prepares the

reader for his ultimate downfall. At the beginning of the play Hamlet expresses his dreams to pass away “ Oh that this too strong flesh would thaw, and resolve itself into a dew.” Making use of ‘ solid’ simply expresses his dream to simply melt and disappear into nothingness.

Some texts however, replace solid with ‘ sullied’, giving the quotation a slightly more interesting meaning, perhaps referring to the incest occurring between his mother and his uncle, a subject on which he must not make his opinions known. It also implies that he is also talking of the corruption in his own flesh. Some interpretations of the play suggest that Hamlet has a possible Oedipus complex (sexual obsession with his mother); this is further highlighted in his later comments about “ incestuous sheets”, although this probably just refers to his mother’s relationship with his uncle.

Incest was a popular vice in the Jacobean genre, as it is regarded to be a mortal sin, specifically when involving a mother and her son. It is clear however that Hamlet does wish to kill himself, although he realises that God is against suicide as it is also a mortal sin, “ That the everlasting had not fix’d his cannon ‘ gainst self slaughter. ” His religious beliefs also conflict with his need to revenge as the church also teaches that revenge is wrong under all circumstances. This conflicts with the Elizabethan revenge tragedy, which usually address’ the dynamics rather than the moral side of revenge.

Hamlet’s role changes throughout the play; in the opening act, Hamlet plays the malcontent. He is still in mourning for the death of his father, almost a juxtaposition to the celebration around him due to his mother’s wedding. The

burden of revenge and the corruption around him leads to his supposed madness, brought on by his inability to cope with the pressure, he comments earlier in the play that he is no 'Hercules'. It is likely that Hamlet uses the disguise of madness to speak the truth, as it excuses him from the consequences of what he says.

An example of this is Hamlet talking to Polonius about his mistreatment of his daughter, "You are a fishmonger [pimp]", as Polonius uses his daughter to get to Hamlet. Hamlet does not wish to be used in this way by the ghost, who may be an evil spirit, and so damn his soul, the main reason perhaps for his procrastination. Shakespeare uses soliloquies to share Hamlet's innermost thoughts with the audience, who sympathise with his various predicaments. These speeches establish Hamlet is more of a scholar than a man of action like his father; he realises this and admits that he is no 'Hercules'.

Without the encouragement of the ghost to revenge it is doubtful that Hamlet would have ever killed Claudius. He has sworn to suffer stoically, and hold his tongue. Even when he is sure that the ghost speaks truth, he will not kill the king while he prays for fear that Claudius will escape hell, "a villain kills my father; and for that, I, his sole son, do this same villain send to heaven". In this sense Hamlet is very much an opposite of Laertes, who wishes to revenge his father's death.

Unlike Hamlet, he is not afraid of being damned for the act of revenge "I dare damnation". Laertes is more of a traditional Jacobean revenger as he

uses the stereotypical images and words of the hero "to cut his throat I' th' church", and is an obvious opposite to Hamlet. It is ironic that Hamlet is incapable of acting on his filial obligation of his father's "most foul and unnatural murder" when he would rid Denmark of corruption by doing so, but Laertes is prepared to revenge the murder of his corrupt father.

It is debatable whether it is Hamlet's procrastination that leads to his eventual death, as at the beginning of the play he threatens Horatio with his sword "unhand me gentlemen, by heaven I'll make a ghost of him that lets me!" It could be suggested that Hamlet's eventual death is due to his disobedience of the ghost's orders, "taint not thy mind", an almost impossible order as Hamlet is exposed to corruption firstly from his uncle, Claudius, the instigator of corruption, also through the accidental murder of Polonius, his doomed relationship with Ophelia and his immoral thoughts of his mother, Hamlet gradually becomes corrupted.

Calderwood comments, "Hamlet's solution for the moment is to take refuge in the cleft between action and inaction. He does not act but instead... plays mad, which cuts his behaviour off from the world of pragmatic affairs in which action and inaction have no meaning." Hamlet, after Claudius' death would have become king, but through revenging he becomes part of the problem "It is a massy wheel.... to whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things are mortis'd..... When it falls, each... petty consequence, attends the boist'rous ruin.

" Hamlet's death provides a fresh start for Denmark. He may not have perhaps made a balanced king, especially due to his outbursts of madness, thus he would be unbeneficial to the kingdom. This is expressed in the play when Rosencrantz says: " The cease of majesty dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw what's near it with it. " It is perhaps due to this reason that Hamlet must die, in order to fully restore order in Denmark. The breaking of the traditional revenge tragedy makes Hamlet so much more appealing to its readers, as it is not confined to the question of how to revenge.

It answers questions to which everyone is prone to debate (do we " take arms" against our problems or suffer stoically? ), hence its popularity.

Shakespeare alerts us to Hamlet's various failings through soliloquies with the audience in which we hear his innermost thoughts. Hamlet's eventual death is due to a combination of emotional stress an inability to act, and his desire to always do the right thing, causing him to slip into a world where he doesn't have to act, but also to wastes valuable time. Hamlet is tainted by the corrupt, a reason in the end for why he must die.