

# Is hamlet a tragic hero



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Hamlet as Tragic Hero Shakespeare's play Hamlet has been the source of criticism for centuries as people try to figure out the behavior of its title character. The young prince vows to avenge his murdered father but then stalls on doing anything until the entire household is killed. It is obvious after reading his story that Hamlet is a tragic hero. His status as a tragic hero is proved by first identifying Aristotle's definition of a tragic hero and then illustrating how Hamlet's character meets the first half of this definition and then how his actions meet the second half.

According to Aristotle, there are six major elements required to make up a tragic hero - three character elements and three behavioral elements. To begin with, the hero must have a noble stature. He must also have excessive pride in some aspect of his being. Finally, he has to have a tragic flaw, usually something related to his source of pride. These three character traits combined lead the character to his or her downfall through a three-step process that comprises the behavioral aspect of Aristotle's definition. This process begins with a mistake in judgment or action that will eventually cause the hero's ruin. The second event is when the hero realizes where he made his mistake. The final event is the reversal of fortunes the hero experiences as a result of his mistake (" Aristotle", 1998). With this definition in hand, it is easy to see how Shakespeare's character Hamlet fits within this definition.

Hamlet meets all three of the character requirements to be defined as a tragic hero. He is noble first because he is truly of noble blood being the only son of the reigning king and queen and second because he is dedicated to doing the right thing. Although everyone else has come out of mourning less than two months after King Hamlet's death in honor of the new royal couple,

Hamlet is accused of wearing black to seem more upset than the others, showing that he is still mourning the death of the old king which was only proper this early after he died. A lot of his inability to act throughout the play is based on this insistence that he act correctly rather than allowing himself to be fooled by the devil. Hamlet's pride is in his intellectual abilities.

However, his fatal flaw is in allowing himself to analyze a situation too much, which slows his actions considerably and provides his uncle with the knowledge that Hamlet suspects his actions.

Hamlet also meets all of the behavioral requirements of Aristotle's definition of the tragic hero. His mistake in judgment is in giving himself the time to fully analyze the possible murder of his father. He reasons that the ghost may be the true ghost of his father and thus is telling the truth or it could be the semblance of his father sent by the devil to tempt Hamlet into doing something that will condemn his soul to hell. To get the proof he needs, he stages a play before the king that re-enacts his father's murder. The king's reaction gives Hamlet the proof he needs but informs Claudius of Hamlet's intentions. It isn't until he is dying of the poisoned wound that Hamlet finally realizes his mistake, completing the second phase of Aristotle's definition and his reversal of fortunes occurs as it is understood that Hamlet should have been king with Ophelia by his side as queen if he had just acted earlier.

Because Hamlet meets all six of the criteria set forward by Aristotle as elements of the tragic hero, it is proved that Hamlet is himself a tragic hero. Aristotle's definition of the term includes three essential character traits and three essential behavioral processes that function together to create the tragic hero. Hamlet demonstrates all three of the character traits in his noble

stature, excessive pride in his intellect and fatal flaw of allowing his intellect to rule his actions. He also demonstrates all three behavioral processes required by Aristotle, in allowing himself to overthink the evidence in front of him regarding his father's murder, in realizing he should have acted sooner and in his death rather than crowning at the end.

#### Works Cited

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