

Hamlet: pro or anti-revenge?

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William Shakespeare's Hamlet is one of the most discussed and debated plays of all time, and many questions are asked about the complex, confusing plot. One of the themes under question is that of revenge. In support of the pro-vengeance view, characters who took revenge or supported it were, with the exception of Claudius, apparently honorable men – Hamlet, Laertes, Fortinbras, and the Ghost. Also, in the eyes of the people just named, avenging the death of a father was a very respectable endeavor, indeed if the dead was not satisfied with the blood of his killer, the deceased's ghost was liable to return to this world and haunt his son. But does Shakespeare truly stand for revenge? In Hamlet, every individual continually supporting revenge goes insane and dies (if he is not already in that lamentable state of health,) and the one son with a murdered father who denounces taking vengeance on the killer inherits another kingdom.

According to Shakespeare, does taking revenge commonly affect one's state of mental health? Yes, it does. After making the fatal decision to kill Claudius because of his late father's death, Hamlet does not immediately go crazy, but is only half-insane, still with enough wit to confuse the whole palace. Before the ghost appeared to him, Hamlet was, apparently, not insane, but furious because of his mother's recent marriage to his former uncle. If he was already crazy, nobody in the castle would have noticed a difference in his conduct. Laertes is the other prominent vengeful son in Hamlet.

In Act III Hamlet murders his father. Leartes is alerted in France, and immediately returns to Denmark threatening to take over the kingdom and thirsty for the prince's blood. From Act IV onward, Laertes can focus on nothing but the demise of the soon-to-be-late prince. Standing in stark

contrast to these hot-blooded young men is Fortinbras, who backs out of avenging his father and attacking Denmark just in time to inherit another throne. No doubt if he had pursued his goals of slaying his father's murderer, Fortinbras would have died in an unnecessary battle and lost both his kingdoms. In Hamlet, not only does everyone seeking revenge for some injustice go insane, they also die along with everyone connected with them.

Along with everyone vengeful going insane, they also experience violent deaths. By the end of Act V, everyone making an attempt on somebody else's life is poisoned with a chalice or the tip of an unblended blade. The only survivors are Fortinbras, the son repentant of his vengeful actions, and Horatio, who shunned revenge from Act I. Not only is everyone in the act of killing another himself slain, but almost everyone associated with the wicked ones were killed. Polonius, Ophelia, Gertrude, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern all died fairly violently, as a direct result of their assistance in someone else's vengeful schemes.

Many may ask why Horatio was not killed along with the rest. The answer is simple. Horatio was a commentator on the action of the play, not a tool twisted by Hamlet's selfish desires, like the other side characters.

Shakespeare makes it very clear that he thoroughly disapproves of revenge, as he shows its consequences, and the rewards of abstaining from it.

Contrary to common belief, Hamlet is not a morbid play revolving around only negative themes such as death, the consequences of revenge, and poison. There are undisputedly positive elements as well, such as the rewards of steering clear of revenge.

By Act II Fortinbras turns from his strictly vengeful ways towards Denmark and seeks to conquer Poland. While his troops march through the rotten state of Denmark, he stops at the royal castle only to find the entire royal family and most of their friends dead on the floor amid pools of blood and a poisoned chalice. Fortinbras states that he has "some rights of memory" for Denmark, meaning that since the royal family was wiped out, he had rights to the throne of Denmark because his extensive pedigree held royal Denmark blood. Because Fortinbras threw away revenge, he inherited the now not-so-rotten state of Denmark while Hamlet, Claudius, and many others died in their violent attempts to satisfy their hunger for blood and power. Between the combined evidence in Hamlet that everyone seeking revenge went mad then died, and one of the only non-vengeful character inherited another entire kingdom, it is safe to say that William Shakespeare did not support revenge.

As a man of his age, Shakespeare sided with the morals of the Elizabethan Age and Biblical principles concerning vengeance on others. Both the Bible and other Elizabethans frowned upon revenge as a course of action, and denounced it strongly. Despite many claims that plays such as William Shakespeare's Hamlet hold no grounds in our modern day lives, I beg to differ. The same principles apply to us today. It is our duty to act according to the Bible and such "outdated" claims against revenge.