

Hamlet tragic flaw

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Question #3: One of the essential elements of any tragic figure is his/her tragic flaw(s)-an inherent personality trait or set of traits that inevitably dooms the character to destruction. Identify and explain Hamlet's tragic flaw(s) and how it/they bring about his downfall. A tragic flaw is a character trait that ultimately causes the downfall of the protagonist. In Hamlet, by William Shakespeare, Hamlet learns the truth behind his father's death - that he was actually murdered by his brother.

Despite swearing to avenge his father, Hamlet is hesitant to take action showing that indecisiveness is his tragic flaw. However, Hamlet's outbursts of aggression at certain instances of the play shows that Hamlet's other tragic flaw is his tendency to take rash actions - the polar opposite of indecisiveness. Ironically, the combination of these two traits, Hamlet's indecision and sudden rash actions, lead to his downfall. There are several points in the book in which we see Hamlet's indecision.

One of the major scenes in which this trait of Hamlet's is clearly seen is when he observes Claudius praying. He had the perfect opportunity to avenge his father, but decided otherwise as he thinks to himself that killing Claudius while he's praying will allow him to go to heaven. Despite having all the reasons in the world to kill Claudius, Hamlet couldn't see himself take action showing his indecision. This could be seen as a reason for his downfall as if he had had the courage to take action at that moment, perhaps the bloodshed at the end of the play wouldn't have happened.

It might seem confusing for a character's tragic flaws to contradict one another, but that is the case for Hamlet with his indecision and rash actions. We see this from Hamlet at various instances of the play in which he

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suddenly turns into a "madman". It is most clearly portrayed when Hamlet suddenly stabs Polonius during his confrontation of his mother. It could be argued that this course of action may have been due to the pent up anger Hamlet had with himself because of his indecision, but in my opinion, this action shows the duplicity of Hamlet's character.

The fact that he could be passive one second and over aggressive the next. Had Hamlet hesitated for a moment rather than mindlessly stabbing Polonius, he could have avoided the bloodbath that followed. Throughout the play, Hamlet's indecision could be seen constantly as he comes up with one excuse after another to delay killing Claudius. At some instances however, we see Hamlet take rash actions as seen when he stabs Polonius without hesitation. Although these two traits are complete opposites of one another, both play a major role in Hamlet's downfall - a fact that makes him such a unique tragic character.