

Hamlet's tragedy: indecision

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Hamlet struggled with the world. He struggled to such an extent that at one point he pondered suicide as a viable means to escape what he thought was the chaos and treachery of human nature. For Hamlet the chaos and treachery he experienced was the product of his tragic flaw, which was thinking too deeply. Being young and not yet wise enough to harness his own intelligence, he paralyzed himself of action as he was in a perpetual contemplative state. Shakespeare conveys Hamlet's unfortunate situation where he faces bleakness and injustices while implying that Hamlet can take action to set things right, however Hamlet's excessively deep thought on his life situation without the ability to handle such depth of thought leads him to inaction; therefore Shakespeare is trying to say that the results of inaction are dangerous. First of all Shakespeare implies that life can be very bleak because of the situation that Hamlet is in. Hamlet's father died and his mother remarried his uncle who took the throne, all within a month. For Gertrude to not show grief, as evidenced by her readiness to remarry, after the death of whom Hamlet describes as "so excellent a king, that was...so loving to his mother," shows a severe weakness in Gertrude's character. Hamlet could not understand how his mother could be so morally flawed and move on so quickly and remarry like nothing ever happened after his father's death. Therefore with good reason Hamlet can ponder on how "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable...seem all the uses of this world." Moreover, when Hamlet encounters the Ghost of his father, Hamlet is even more aware of the utter injustices that can present themselves in humanity. The Ghost tells Hamlet that people of Denmark have believed in a lie that a snake had killed him in his sleep. However the Ghost explains how he was actually murdered

in horrible fashion when Claudius poured a vile of poison in his ear that killed him in excruciating pain within minutes. Upon hearing that, Hamlet resolves to fight the injustices within Denmark by avenging his father at all costs. For also in Shakespeare's time, usurping the throne was a capital offense, as the ruler was believed to be anointed by God. Therefore to wrongfully seize the throne, especially by means of murder, is a crime against God. Thus Shakespeare is implying that revenge is the right course of action to take. Furthermore, Shakespeare intended for the Ghost to provide honest evidence to convince Hamlet to take revenge. Indeed, the rare appearance of a ghost is indicative of something being "horribly wrong in the state of Denmark." However there is even greater evidence of the Ghost's honesty. First of all, Shakespeare writes on two occasions of scenes where Claudius is obviously aware of his crime. In Act 3 Hamlet runs a play where he re-enacts King Hamlet's murder; Claudius then rises to demand the play be stopped, which indicates that he's experiencing his guilty conscience. Then the most explicit evidence comes after the play when Claudius confesses to crimes; he explicitly states that his "offense is rank, it smells to Heaven" as it is "a brother's murder." It is also worth noting that, although Hamlet does not hear when Claudius explicitly confesses for his murder against King Hamlet, he was aware of Claudius being guilty based upon the very fact that he was confessing, and also by the fact that he took offense for the scene representing King Hamlet's murder in Hamlet's play. Thus it seems that Shakespeare was conveying that revenge was the right action for Hamlet to undertake. However, Hamlet continually delays getting revenge. It is because Hamlet cannot handle such excessive depth of thought, which has

rendered him unable to take action. For instead of taking action to bring Claudius to justice, Hamlet ponders whether "to be or not to be." It is wrong, in the situation that Hamlet is in, for him to think to such depth. To struggle over "whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and, by opposing, end them" is essentially contemplating suicide. If Hamlet contemplates suicide while he knows that Claudius has usurped his father's throne, and while he promised his father's Ghost that he would avenge him, is morally flawed. It is morally flawed because Hamlet has an extremely important task to accomplish, so instead of mustering the strength and will to accomplish the task he contemplates whether or not life is worth living. Therefore Hamlet is going nowhere because he is paralyzing himself of taking action by ruminating over metaphysical concepts. When Hamlet has his sword drawn at the perfect opportunity to kill Claudius alone at a chapel, he thinks upon the act of Claudius praying, and says to himself "this is hire and salary, not revenge." Hamlet thought if he killed Claudius he would go to heaven since he prayed for forgiveness. Even though the Ghost told Hamlet to simply get revenge, Hamlet ponders on the possibility for Claudius to enter Heaven. However whether or not Claudius goes to Heaven has no bearing on whether or not justice is done to weed out a cunning and murderous king. If Hamlet could have simply focused on the present moment, and the action that needed to be done to bring justice to Denmark, then Hamlet may have succeeded in getting revenge. But, Hamlet's excessive depth of thought, which causes his hesitancy to act, only keeps injustice alive on Earth. Hamlet realizes on multiple occasions that he's been

utterly inactive in his resolve he despises himself for it. He says " Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave, That I, the son of a dear father murdered, Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell, Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words. " Hamlet realizes himself that his life is going nowhere, and does not know he lives to say " This thing's to do, " since he has " cause and will and strength and means to do 't. " Lastly, Shakespeare was trying to say that the results of inaction are disastrous. First of all, since Claudius is directly responsible for the deaths at the end of the play, it is evident then, how dangerous Hamlet's inaction was. Hamlet knew all along that Claudius was an " incestuous, murderous, damned Dane, " but only kills him when he is intoxicated by Claudius' poisoned blade. Therefore it is extremely unfortunate that Hamlet knew how rank and vile Claudius was since Act 1 when he encountered the Ghost who explained to him how with " wicked wit and gifts" " that adulterate beast" poisoned him. If only Hamlet seized the opportunity in Act 3 to kill Claudius while he was alone praying then Claudius would not have posed a threat to Denmark, and then Prince Hamlet would have been able to rightfully taken the throne. But aside from Hamlet's inaction simply keeping Claudius alive, Hamlet's excessive contemplation and inaction created great tension within him. Since Hamlet always postponed revenge because of his distracting thoughts and then came to realize later that he delayed revenge because of his " craven scruple of thinking to precisely on th' event, " caused Hamlet great distress. This tension and distress led Hamlet to behave erratically and somewhat insanely, which resulted in people turning against him. Claudius, Getrude, Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were all puzzled by Hamlet's erratic

behavior wondering " why he puts on this confusion, grating harshly all his days of quite with turbulent and dangerous lunacy". Indeed Hamlet's behavior while he is in his contemplative state of inaction does border on lunacy. A glaring example of Hamlet's less than sane behavior is when Hamlet stabs Polonius to death. Although Hamlet thought Polonius to be Claudius at first, Hamlet acted quite insane. When Gertrude exclaimed to him what a " rash and bloody deed" it was that he killed Polonius, Hamlet, like a psychopath, exhibited absolutely no pangs of remorse or intentions to apologize for his mistake. Instead Hamlet lifted up Polonius' body and spitefully said that he was a " wretched, rash, intruding fool, " and then he threw ad-hominem attacks at Gertrude saying her " habitual wickedness" made her " invulnerable to sense. " Even the Ghost appears in the scene to tell Hamlet not to lose sight of " his almost blunted purpose. " Therefore the Ghost is implying that Hamlet needs to act upon his duty of avenging him rather than perpetuating his insanity by staying inactive. However, it was too late for Hamlet to heed the Ghost's words. In killing Polonius without exhibiting any remorse, Hamlet enraged the fiery Laertes to avenge his father. Therefore Claudius and Laertes agreed to kill Hamlet by poisoning him in a fencing match. The poisoning doesn't just kill Hamlet though because Gertrude drinks the poisoned drink intended for Hamlet, Laertes and Hamlet each stab each other with the poisoned blade, and then Laertes tell Hamlet to kill Claudius for devising such a calamitous event. Therefore Denmark is in absolute turmoil. It is on the eve of being invaded by Fortinbras' army, and when Fortinbras finally invades the castle he exclaims, " this quarry cries on havoc...so many princes at a shot so bloodily hast

struck? " Indeed, it is havoc that Hamlet was responsible for as his inaction not only kept the villainous Claudius alive, but it also created unnecessary tension within Hamlet. The tension that built up in Hamlet as a result of his guilt for failing to act caused Hamlet to behave insanely which ultimately led to Denmark's demise. Hence through Hamlet, Shakespeare tried to convey the dangers of inaction. Even though Hamlet was thrown into an unfortunate situation where his corrupt uncle murdered his father and usurped his throne, Hamlet could've acted to avenge his father. However Hamlet thought in excess depth on his life situation, and couldn't act on what he intended. Hamlet's inaction only resulted in death.