

Shakespeare's presentation of hamlet essay sample

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It was a popular belief during Elizabethan times that if a man had been wronged and the state failed to see that justice was done, a son's duty was to take it into his own hands and seek revenge. Shakespeare presents Hamlet as a typical revenge play of the time, where the central character, Hamlet, has a duty to avenge his father's death. In Hamlet, Fortinbras and Laertes are also seen as revenge heroes, but in character contrast Hamlet in how he acts on his duty.

This contrast highlights that whereas Fortinbras and Laertes are simplistic conventional revenge heroes, Hamlet on the other hand has the conventional features of a revenge hero, but is also seen as so much more. This is due to his awareness of religious principles and despite being Protestant, at times makes slight transitions to Catholic ideas. It is also due to his constant contemplation of the effects of his actions, rationalising the situation he is put in.

Fortinbras is presented as a typical king who lives up to the reputation of his father with the aim to "recover /So by his father lost". His aim is put into practice; Fortinbras, after threatening to invade Denmark, succeeds in doing so and is thereby fulfilling his role as a revenge hero. Similarly with Laertes, in the discovery of finding his father, Polonius, being murdered by Hamlet, he immediately takes on the role of an uncomplicated revenge hero, compelled to make Hamlet suffer as soon as is possible.

Both of these characters are not complete conventional revenge heroes, as they do not experience the key stages one traditionally went through. For example, an appearance of a Ghost and a significant delay of their actions

are lacking. Hamlet however, not only is a complete typical avenger being called upon by the Ghost to settle the murder Claudius committed, but is also presented as being much more; by the end he is an exclusive, heroic individual. Hamlet is completely different to Fortinbras and Laertes because of his character.

Fortinbras is a man comfortable in his position; Horatio describes him as having “ most emulate pride” for being “ Fortinbras of Norway”, so we can see that he is a natural avenger who holds the key values of pride, duty and respect, having a strong passion to restore his father's honour. Hamlet does not share the same feelings as Fortinbras, shown in his first soliloquy. Hamlet says Claudius is “ no more like my father/Than I to Hercules”. His reference to being so far from like Hercules reveals that he does not possess a thrive for being powerful with natural vengeance.

It is true that he does go through the key stages of a conventional revenge hero: an interaction with a Ghost, delaying their actions in order for there to be a play, and playing madness in the delay, but Shakespeare puts this play forward as a far more complex revenge tragedy due to Hamlet's consideration of his confused religious beliefs and his extended inability to act due to moral complications. The confrontation between Hamlet and his Catholic father as a Ghost is the beginning of Hamlet's journey to being a revenge hero.

The Ghost describes his stay in purgatory, a place that is common to Catholic belief, as his “ foul crimes... are burnt and purged away”. However, Hamlet is

Protestant especially as he attends Wittenberg University and so the Ghost provides confusion for his religious beliefs particularly as he trusts the Ghost in what it reveals about Claudius. The confusion Hamlet experiences is reflected in his soliloquies, where he displays his unnerved feeling about what comes with death after killing Claudius.

Laertes is a parallel to Hamlet in this respect, as Laertes being Catholic means he believes his sins can be forgiven in purgatory; Hamlet fears he could go to hell. Furthermore, Hamlet even begins speaking in Latin, “hic et ubique” which is the language of Catholicism. Laertes will have his revenge whatever it takes, as he says “to cut his throat I’ th’ church” and so he will even kill in the most holy place. Hamlet is thus emphasised as being a respected individual, as he naturally considers the implications of different Christian beliefs.

He also shows full awareness that he cannot commit suicide, as this was condemned by the Church and would send him straight to hell. The Ghost significantly tells him at the end, “Remember me” which burdens Hamlet with the responsibility of duty and honour. Hamlet’s knows of the corruption, describing that there is “something rotten in the state of Denmark” and even uses the metaphor, “Denmark’s a prison”. This corruption stems from Claudius at the centre and if the head is corrupt then so is the whole of Denmark.

Therefore, Hamlet’s transformation into a revenge hero is such a huge task for such a thoughtful, rationalising character. Hamlet’s initial delay to act

follows the convention of revenge heroes, which is specifically clear in his early soliloquies. In Act 1, Scene 2 he eloquently presents his current state of mind where he contemplates suicide: " O, that this too solid flesh would melt". We can see that he is self-condemning to a life in hell, therefore Hamlet is embodying an ordinary human persona as opposed to someone who can seek revenge easily.

The way in which he is demonstrated as being unconventional is his looking beyond wanting revenge, as he knows that Denmark is a corrupt nation: " tis an unweeded garden". In this way, Hamlet is much more than the conventional revenge hero as he not only considers the effects his actions will have on himself but also contemplates in depth the extended reasons for killing Claudius, the main being to cleanse Denmark. Hamlet constantly rationalises and makes transitions between Protestant belief of hell and Catholic belief of Purgatory, which adds to what is stopping him from acting.

It is true that a traditional revenge hero delays their act of revenge in order for there to be a play, but Shakespeare portrays Hamlet's delay as a result of his character and the need to fully agree to sacrifice his life, in return for revenge. Ophelia's burial and Hamlet's return in Act V, scene 1 is where the tragedy seizes closure and we realise just how far Hamlet has come beyond a conventional revenge hero.

The gravediggers treat the skulls with such stoicism and it is when Hamlet discovers he knew the person of one skull that he says, " Alas poor Yorick! The image of Hamlet contemplating the skull of Yorick who was a court

jester, symbolises vital aspects of human consciousness. Linked to his first soliloquy, Hamlet ponders the nature of mortality. He has now realised the short time in which we have to act and recognises his own failure to be a dutiful son and avenge his father's death. In addition, his confirmation of Ophelia's murder seems to fill him with guilt, as but we see Hamlet as a heroic person, when he says, " This is I, Hamlet the Dane" and leaps into the grave, declaring his presence and the funeral seal's Hamlet's death warrant.

This shows that he is finally claiming Denmark as his territory and realises that not only will he complete the responsibility he holds of avenging his father's death, but he will also purify the nation where things are " rank and gross in nature. " Hamlet is identifiably separate from other revenge heroes as he develops as a character throughout the play and alone, makes the transition from feeling bitter about the murder of his father to justifying that Denmark needs him to execute the source of all corruption.

His transition is particularly highlighted from his third soliloquy in Act 3, scene 1 where he says, " to be or not to be" and his " dread of something after death. " Hamlet prevents himself from advancing, as he is scared of what will happen to him in afterlife. He is a refined intellectual who continuously battles with his conscience, until he later says in Act 5, scene 2, " Let be. " This links to what he said earlier on in the play, " to be or not to be" and so this perfect iambic phrase puts emphasis on the fact that Hamlet accepts that for the restoration of health, he cannot know or worry about what there is in his afterlife.

The great difference between Fortinbras and Hamlet is that Fortinbras wants revenge and from the beginning makes preparations for war. Hamlet as a person does not just want revenge for satisfactory reasons and for the feeling of completion, but instead wants to expose the guilty conscience of Claudius without endangering his own life. Unlike Laertes who similarly to Fortinbras is a natural avenger, Hamlet is not as he does not have that medieval mind being a Protestant.

However, the main reason why Hamlet is much more than just a conventional revenge hero is because his delay is not just for the purpose of there being a play long enough for people to watch, but instead is for Hamlet to intellectually rationalise his responsibilities of birthright and manages to reach a resolution that by killing Claudius, he becomes the revenge hero but also becomes heroic just as a character as he recognises that his disposition is not to act, which is clear from the beginning when he tells Polonius that " rejects vengeance

In conclusion, neither Fortinbras and Laertes or Hamlet are just fully conventional revenge heroes, as Fortinbras and Laertes are presented as being basic forms, missing some of the prime stages a conventional revenge hero must experience. Hamlet is placed on the other side of the spectrum as he is developed throughout to be much more than the traditional hero of a revenge tragedy in Elizabethan plays.

Fortinbras has the values of honour and duty with a sense of pride and so it is within him to act without thinking through implications of his actions as he

has such a craving for revenge. Likewise, Laertes also wants, from the moment Polonius is killed, to seek revenge and contrasting to Hamlet, acts with complete immediacy.

Hamlet does follow the stages a conventional revenge hero must go through, but due to his character, he uses his capacity of thought to consciously contemplate the position he has been put into, thereby extending his delay to act even further. Arguably, Hamlet continually postponing to act until he is certain about doing so, is the only way for a successful outcome as other avengers for example Laertes, act irrationally and he results in being influenced by Claudius' ideas of revenge leading to Laertes himself also being poisoned.

None the less, it is near the end that he is revealed to be far more heroic than the average avenger, as he manages to reach the conclusion he longed to find throughout the play, that he can accept his birth right and responsibilities, combined with knowing that killing Claudius will not be murder, it will be purging and cleaning Denmark from being "rank" and full of rottenness. Overall, Hamlet is so much more than a conventional revenge hero as he sacrifices his own desires to redeem the nation.