

Hamlet Paper

You are to write a 2-3 page think piece on *Hamlet*. No late papers will be accepted. You must include no fewer than 5 quotes to support your position. The paper must be written in MLA format. The paper is worth 50 points.

Hamlet: a tragic hero?

"Tragedy" is the conventional description of a play that portrays human suffering and the decline and death of a hero or heroine. Traditionally the hero (or heroine) was of high status, and the fall from grace immense. However, some modern tragedies have an ordinary person as the "tragic hero." In your think piece, choose one of the following interpretations of Hamlet as a tragic hero:

Tragic Flaw? The hero's downfall is caused by a 'tragic flaw' or blemish in character. Hamlet's weakness may be that he 'thinks too much' and cannot make up his mind. The resulting inaction leads to his death. But Hamlet's 'tragic flaw' may be some other feature in his character responsible for his downfall.

A tragedy of fate? The hero has no real control over his destiny. Once the spring of Hamlet's tragic narrative is released, it unwinds inevitably towards its conclusion: the death of Hamlet. His fate is predetermined. As Hamlet says, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends...."

A tragedy of chance? Accident and bad luck determine the fate of the hero. The unplanned chance encounter with the pirate ship, for example, brings Hamlet back to Denmark. Hamlet accidentally kills Polonius. The tragic hero is the victim of random uncertainty.

Irreconcilable opposites? The hero's character comprises irreconcilable sets of forces. Hamlet's mind and feelings are filled with such tensions: reason battles with passion; love is contrasted with lust; action is inhibited by thought. Hamlet struggles with a wish to die and an urge to live.

Hero as paragon? The tragic hero has an excess of virtues. This 19th century Romantic view of Hamlet as a Renaissance prince suggests that he is more noble and refined than ordinary people, and that his nobility and purity carry the seeds of their own destruction. Hamlet cannot live in the world because he is too "good" for it. His sensitivity and noble qualities lead to his downfall.