



Hamlet and Me: Partners in Procrastination

I face Procrastination on a daily basis. I mean with such a level of intensity that Procrastination and I have a face-off. We both stare each other down, not moving, not doing anything. That is what we do best. Procrastination is my arch nemesis, and he comes around whenever I am unwilling to do an unpleasant task. After reading Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, I realized that Hamlet, too, had faced Procrastination on multiple occasions. Just as Hamlet delays killing King Claudius, an unpleasant task assigned by the ghost of his father, I delay doing my homework, an unpleasant task assigned by my teachers. Hamlet and I both let stress build up until there is not much time left as a result of unwillingness to do our assigned duties, generating a sudden drive to get the job done, however sloppily.

Hamlet procrastinates avenging his father by making excuses for himself and convincing himself that it would be better to complete the difficult task at a later time. Hamlet has a chance to kill Claudius when he comes across Claudius while he is vulnerable, alone, and trying to pray. Hamlet draws his sword, only to put it back after telling himself, "I am then revenged to take him in the purging of his soul, when he is it and seasoned for his passage? Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent" (3.3.89-93). Hamlet had the perfect opportunity to kill Claudius when he came across him while he was isolated and caught up in deep reflection. However, shortly after drawing his sword, Hamlet creates a "moral" excuse for himself that conveniently dictates that he should kill Claudius at a later time, when the king is doing some less innocent and less holy act. Hamlet had an opportunity to complete his task earlier and more easily than he otherwise would have, but he does not seize this opportunity, showing signs of a true procrastinator like myself.

I procrastinate the completion of my homework by making excuses for myself and convincing myself that it would be better to complete the difficult task at a later time. I have the chance to at least start my homework as soon as I get home, or at least the night it is assigned. Just as Hamlet draws his sword in preparation of avenging his father, only to put it back, I open up my laptop in preparation of writing an essay like this, only to find myself typing in the letters "facebook.com" instead of "docs.google.com." Whoops. I tell myself, *I have badminton in an hour, so there is barely enough time to do what I want to get done, and I certainly do not want to feel pressed for time while I am writing this essay...so I'll get it done when I have a bigger window of time to sit down at my computer and let my creative genius flow.* I know. Whose logic was that, right? (Mine.) I create a convenient excuse, by convincing myself that I have some sort of "creative genius" that must "flow" in a greater time window. Similarly to Hamlet, my excuse causes me to pass up on a moment which may lead me to success. Instead, as a result of our

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excuses, Hamlet and I find ourselves beginning to feel the stress and pressure of allowing Procrastination to fool us once again.

Hamlet's painfully difficult, burdensome task still has yet to be completed, and he allows the stress and pressure of his burden to build up, resulting in a sense of urgency to complete the task. After a long period of procrastination, Hamlet finds himself banished from Denmark before he has even completed his assigned task. (This is like when your mom calls you out sick the day before the paper is due.) After his encounter with one of Fortinbras's soldiers, Hamlet admits to himself, "I do not know why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do,' sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means to do't" (4.4.46-49). Hamlet is beginning to feel the stress of procrastination. He tells himself he had all the right reasons and optimal conditions to avenge his father all along, and now sees that his excuses were invalid. Hamlet sees Fortinbras's army maintaining their will and drive to complete even the most trivial of tasks, proving to him that excuses can no longer cover up his own inaction. He still lives to say "This thing's to do," and can now feel the urgency to do it. I feel a similar feeling when my heart sinks and I realize where my excuses have brought me.

When my painfully difficult, burdensome tasks have yet to be completed, I allow the stress and pressure of the burden to build up, resulting in a sense of urgency to complete the task. After a long period of procrastination, I find myself thinking of a way out. (Maybe my mom can call me out sick the day the paper is due?). The more time I spend making myself this sandwich or telling myself, *I need a moment to relax*, the more stressed out I become. I can feel my heart pounding when I think of the calculus test, the biology lab report, the English essay, and the French essay on how to combat racism according to what I learned from the Algerian man's interview (I had no idea what he was saying.) - all due tomorrow! But alas, my excuses can no longer cover up my inaction: It is the *night before the due date*. My sense of urgency, and that alone, drives me to complete these tasks, however sloppily I must.

With a lack of excuses left and a newfound sense of urgency, Hamlet resolves to return to Denmark, finally taking action and accomplishing his goal, but not in the way he had imagined himself doing so. Hamlet does kill King Claudius in the final fight sequence of the play, but only after he is wounded by the poisoned tip of the sword. In fact, there is so much death and confusion in this sequence that Horatio cannot help but exclaim, with a sense of utter confusion, "They bleed on both sides - How is it, my lord?" (5.2.334). Indeed, "both sides" are hurt. Hamlet's goal was finally accomplished, but at the cost of its proper execution. (No pun intended.) I, too, complete my assigned tasks at the cost of their quality.

With a lack of excuses left and a newfound sense of urgency, I resolve to get my work done, finally taking action and accomplishing my goal, but not in the way I had imagined myself

doing so. I do get my homework done, but only the night before it is due, when I am forced to stay up late or wake up early, typing up words (not a single one of those words being "facebook.com"). I get the paper done at 5:00 in the morning after having woken up at 3:00 to write it. I have a headache the whole time and my stomach has that feeling of being simultaneously hungry and not hungry, just enough of both so that I feel sick. In that state, it is near impossible to write a coherent thesis, remember to delete all of my contractions, and include those smooth transitions that Deerfield teachers are so crazy about. Unlike Hamlet, I am not wounded, but my grades are.

Hamlet's story allowed me to closely observe the slow process by which Procrastination enters our lives and takes control. For example, I have never had to pay close attention to or analyze the ways in which procrastination affects my life. I know that sometimes I sacrifice some sleep here and there, but I did not realize what a gradual process procrastination is, and I was unable to see how many opportunities I had to stop it. As a reader, I was frustrated with Hamlet when passed up his chance to kill Claudius and avenge his father once and for all. I could not stop questioning why he would not seize the most opportune moment possible to complete the task at hand. I then realized that I do the same thing on a daily basis. Hamlet's habit of making excuses for himself only caused me to identify with him further.

I can empathize with Hamlet more easily after having found a common ground, a means of identifying with him. I realized that Hamlet and I are simply two characters in search of an exit. We use excuses until we have exhausted them. We both metaphorically want our moms to call us out of school sick. Though I have never killed someone or felt the pressure of having to do so, I imagine it is a similar feeling to being a seventeen-year-old writing an essay in French about how to solve the world's racism according to the Algerian man whose interview you cannot find closed captioning for anywhere on the internet. Nobody, not even royalty, wants to complete an unpleasant task. In this way, I was able to see that the Danish Prince and I are not so dissimilar, therefore enabling me to care more deeply about and pay close attention to the predicaments he found himself in, so that I can avoid these situations, so as to no longer be able to draw parallels between my life and that of Hamlet.

Awareness of one's own procrastination and the means by which one resolves to do one's duty express a lot about that person. For example, I am constantly aware of my tendency to procrastinate and find it hard to learn from each past encounter with Procrastination. Upon each return of my arch nemesis, I politely invite him in for a cup of tea. I have come to realize I am someone who very consciously avoids sources of unhappiness and displeasure (homework) at almost any cost. My procrastination is somewhat of an affirmation that I am a fun-loving, labor-despising person, who tends to show aversion to that which requires great effort. I believe that Hamlet is also of this nature. Hamlet is a "thinker" and not "doer." I believe that the one

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thing required to turn “thinkers” into “doers” is a bit of inspiration. Whether that inspiration comes from watching an actor who “could force his soul so to his own conceit” (2.2.580), an encounter with Fortinbras’s army, or simply the fact that your French racism essay is due next period, “thinkers” must use their inspiration overcome Procrastination and become “doers.” And so, to all those who are playing a kind host to Procrastination: Kick him out and send him on his way. Hamlet and I have learned our lesson. It is about time you learn yours.