
Action And Inaction in The Play "Hamlet", Novel "The Kite Runner" And Poem "Unchangeable Past"

Introduction

Raise your hand if you have ever seen a friend being bullied, but you turned the other way. Pretended you could not see them. Why? Because chances are, now that you think of it, you may regret it. Or how about that time your mind told you not to hurt someone but your heart turned cold and hurt them anyway because you wanted them to feel pain for whatever it was they did? You were selfish. Do you regret it? And... what about the time you wanted to apologize to someone but any time you attempted to, you stopped yourself, and now it's too late. Do you regret it now? Meister Eckhart once said, "The great price of inaction is far greater than the cost of making a mistake." Action and inaction are both decisions that can be made by an individual which produce very different outcomes in a situation. The play Hamlet, novel The Kite Runner and poem Unchangeable Past, are all excellent representations of the way a person's mind causes actions and inaction which have the potential to lead to negative outcomes in one's life.

Hamlet: In the play Hamlet, the main character, Hamlet struggles with committing to his plan to murder his uncle, Claudius. Hamlet has the perfect opportunity to murder his uncle but cannot decide whether he should do it then or kill Claudius during another time where Hamlet can ensure that his uncle suffers. Hamlet says, "Up, sword; and know thou a more horrid hent: When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage, or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed, at gaming, swearing, or about some act that has no relish of salvation in't: then trip him, that his heels may kick back at heaven and that his soul may be as damn'd and black as hell, whereto it goes".

If one looks at this situation from a psychoanalytic perspective, Hamlet has a tremendous desire to get revenge on his uncle. However, Hamlet's desire takes over and brings out his flaw of indecisiveness. Hamlet believes that once he kills his uncle during the moment presented in act 3, his uncle will not suffer enough and will go to heaven since he is praying at the time. So he decides to remain inactive and not murder his uncle. This inaction leads to destruction in Hamlet's life. Had Hamlet made the action, and killed Claudius, he may have altered his fate and steered the play in other countless directions. Evidently, Hamlet's desire to see his uncle suffer, leads to his inaction and in the end, this causes Hamlet's downfall. Hamlet breaks his trend of inactivity at the end of the play when he finally murders Claudius. Even though Hamlet accomplishes what he desires, his actions paint a very different ending than he pictures.

Amir: Amir is very similar to the character of Hamlet because Amir also struggles with inactivity for a significant part of his life and also has a desire. The most evident situation is when Hassan is raped. Amir desires Baba's attention for many years and for this reason, he has the hope that once he wins the kite contest, Baba will love and give Amir more attention. On the day Amir wins the kite contest, his life and Hassan's life changes forever because Amir's desire causes him to remain inactive when Hassan is being raped. Amir also fears that he will also be hurt physically by Assef.

As a result, instead of helping his friend, Amir simply hides and watches as Hassan, his true

friend gets raped. Amir says, "Hassan was standing at the blind end of the alley in a defiant stance: fists curled, legs slightly apart. Behind him, sitting on piles of scrap and rubble, was the blue kite. My key to Baba's heart" (Amir says this on page 71). Hassan has the opportunity to escape by giving Assef the kite. Despite this, Hassan protects the kite and remains loyal to Amir by sacrificing himself because he knows how much the kite means to Amir. Amir sees this loyalty, however, he is so caught up in his own desire and fear and instead of helping Hassan, Amir does nothing to help his friend, who he later discovers is his brother. All in all, his inactivity is the reason that Amir lives many years of his life feeling extreme guilt, sadness and regret.

Like Hamlet, Amir leads himself to conflict in his own life that could have been overcome by simply doing an action. Amir breaks his trend of inactivity when he adopts Hassan's child, Sohrab to give him a better life. Even though Hassan passes away, it is as though Amir has redeemed himself and releases most of his guilt by adopting Sohrab. The adoption is a way for Amir to correct his past. However, just like Hamlet accomplishing his desire to kill Claudius, Amir accomplishes what he desires by becoming closer to Baba and even letting go of most of the guilt he feels for betraying Hassan. Unfortunately, like Hamlet, his actions were too late because Hassan had already died and there will never be a way to completely make up for his inactivity from many years before. The final text that I selected which relates to the theme of action and inaction is a poem titled "Unchangeable Past" by Kyli Santiago because it highlights that the actions an individual does or fails to do always impact that individual in some way.

The poem mentions things such as, "If I made different choices, I would not be haunted by the voices inside my head; the unchangeable past is a fine fabric woven with fear, regret and guilt. The Unchangeable past I must admit, I was ignorant of your power. To control my every second minute hour. To fill my thoughts with pain. To drive me practically insane. To make me want to slit my vein. To turn my sunny days to rain. And even though it is not wet outside - I'm helplessly drowning on the inside. Indeed the past is unforgiving, full of painful regret for the living. And if I knew then what I know now- I would go back." These lines in the poem all connect with the other texts because the lines reflect some of the negative emotions characters, especially the main characters Hamlet and Amir face when realizing that their action and inaction form the direction of their lives.

A repeated line in the poem is, "The unchangeable past is unforgiving." This is very true and is seen with characters in Hamlet and The Kite Runner. Hamlet's inaction where he does not murder his uncle sooner rather than later, destroys him because when he eventually does the action of killing his uncle, it is too late and Hamlet himself dies too. The fact is, Hamlet's action and inaction creates a past that can never be changed and is very unforgiving. Additionally, Amir also shows how one's past is unforgiving. Amir chooses the path of inactivity while Hassan is raped and can never fully redeem himself for choosing to do nothing when his friend is in need of his help. For this reason, the thoughts of his past torture him from that day on.

All in all, Hamlet and The Kite Runner are pieces of literature which showcase how characters' desires get the best of them and cause their activity and inactivity, which results in negative outcomes in their lives. The poem Unchangeable Past reinforces the idea that these negative outcomes can never be changed because the past is the past. Therefore, these texts should be an example to all of us of how to make decisions wisely. Santiago's poem really says it best: The Unchangeable Past is an intangible creature that weaves the intricate pattern of your destined future. Undeniable are the lessons it gives, priceless are the blessings you live, if you learn from it- in the present. Be warned, you can never go back and change it, rearrange it - or

alter its course. So live your life now with much more force. Create your present with more awareness, make your every move much more deliberate. Be sure your actions and intentions are creating the kind of future that you can one day live with.

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