Question B:

Critics have argued that Hamlet is unfit for the task of revenge. Do you agree? Support your response with close textual evidence from the play.

**F. Richmon once said, “Hamlet is a man of painful sensitivity.” It is this painful sensitivity that makes him completely unfit for the task of revenge. Audiences of Shakespeare’s tragedy quickly become aware of Hamlet’s verbose and loquacious disposition, which renders him** incompetent and inept for the bloody task of avenging his father’s murder. Shakespeare cleverly highlights Laertes’ and Fortinbras’ capacity for revenge, which juxtaposes and emphasises Hamlet’s own inadequacies. Furthermore, it is Hamlet’s reflective and philosophical demeanour that constitutes his futility in enacting revenge.

Hamlet’s obsession with words and language only serves to highlight his incompetence and inability to enact revenge. From the very outset of the beginning, Hamlet repeats the phrase, “words, words, words” to Polonius, paralleling his fascination with language and word play. Hamlet is a master wordsmith, toying with puns, “A little more than kin and less than kind,” and imagery, ““Not so, my lord. I am too much i’ the sun,” to signify his intense wit and intelligence. Hamlet’s fascination with his own discourse incapacitates his ability to perform his filial duty. During his third soliloquy, he berates himself for his lack of action and his passion for discourse, “must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words.” The Kenneth Branagh film version (1996) has the actor emphasise and stress the meaning of the phrase, “words” to illuminate Hamlet’s obsession. His manipulation of language extends to his metaphorical description of Denmark as a “prison” and “unweeded garden”. Hamlet is trapped within his aphoristic rhetoric, buried under an uncontrollable mania of speaking and thinking. The final lines spoken by the prince, “the rest is silence” cleverly elucidate his awareness of his flaw – he spent too much time talking and reflecting, ultimately causing the death of seven others and himself. He is garrulous and longwinded, and it is his obsession with words and language significantly renders him unfit for the task of revenge.

If Hamlet is unfit for the task of revenge then Shakespeare contrasts him against Laertes and Fortinbras who are fit for the task. Laertes’ passionate and emotional response to the deaths of his father and sister lead him to immediate action, “...only I’ll be revenged most thoroughly for my father.” He dramatically storms into Claudius’ court and threatens the King’s life and fanatically dives into Ophelia’s grave, bravely exclaiming, “I dare damnation!” His actions demonstrate he is indeed fit for the task.

Fortinbras is strongminded and impulsive, rushing into decisions and taking action. Shakespeare juxtaposes him and Hamlet as Fortinbras prepares his army, “rightly to be great is not to stir without great argument...” Hamlet’s poetic and artistic disposition is contrasted against Fortinbras’ gallant and impetuous nature.

Hamlet himself initially resents his duty to avenge his father, “O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right.”

Ultimately, Hamlet’s reflective and philosophical nature makes him unfit for the task of revenge. He is acutely aware of his inevitable task, “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.” Together with his existential manifestos and rhetorical questions on life and death, “to be or not to be?” and “what is man?”, Hamlet’s rational demeanour makes him useless when it comes to enacting revenge. Shakespeare utilises his soliloquies to reflect his pensive and introspective character. Soliloquy one showcases...