Laertes, an unfortunate antagonist in William Shakespeare’s tragic novel *Hamlet*, is a symbol of the corruptive human desire for justice. Distraught at the adventitious murder of his father by the protagonist of the novel, Laertes seeks to restore order in his life through reacting to measures and changes in surroundings by actions of equal magnitude. Such discrepancies in the ‘Great Chain of Being’ (St. Thomas Aquinas) and alterations in the natural order make Laertes warrant any counteraction as a pursuit of righteous justice. Subsequently, his vengeful desires engulf his existence as he fails to come into accord with an unfair action and he allows himself to disregard his own life in his quest of delivering deserved punishment. His fear of change hinders the ability to reflect upon consequent actions as he allows emotions to supersede and cloud all judgment. As a result, Laertes finds himself devoid of true justice as he is regretful of the means by which he sought evenhandedness from Hamlet. Shakespeare employs Laertes’ struggles in his failed search for justice and emphasizes the weakness of the mind when weighed down by overpowering sentiments in order to portray the human flaw of desire that impedes the ability to attain complete equality.

Laertes’ emotions and longing for vengeance force him to overlook manipulation by external powers and he finds himself regretful of his retributive actions. A single power of revenge fuels Laertes’ motivations and obfuscates his ability to thoroughly reason his actions. For example, intent upon revenge and justification for Polonius’ death, Laertes finds himself
willing to pursue reprisal irrespective of the costs and results that entail true justice, “I dare damnation. To this point I stand, / That both world I give to negligence, / Let come what comes; / I’ll be revenged most thoroughly for my father” (IV.v.144). Laertes regards revenge as the sole reaction to resolve such turmoil and the vengeance serves as the only reason for him to continue living. He would rather die aspiring for justice than live with a soul that will not be at rest until all within mortal control has been exercised to fulfill the payback. Laertes does not allow himself to come into accords with Hamlet’s actions and notions of vengeance drive him towards his want for balance in life. In addition, Laertes fail to recognize the intentions and purpose behind actions of others as his judgment is clouded by the overpowering motivation. Laertes conforms to the plan devised by Claudius to make Hamlet pay his fair dues and his negligence of Claudius’ motives propels him to tread upon the easiest path towards justice, “My lord, I will be ruled; The rather, if you could devise it so That I might be the organ” (IV.vii.76). Undying crave for Laertes’ conceived notion of justice through equal and opposite reaction succumbs him to manipulation by external forces. The paradoxical nature of justice prevents him from treading upon his own path because while his narrowed target and purpose in life push him towards attaining fairness, righteousness as the only ambition hinders him from realizing his guilt. Laertes’ tragic downfall is a result of his ignorance of human selfishness and limited scope of his surroundings. Furthermore, it is not until the burden of revenge is lifted that one becomes cognizant of the guilt and manipulation. Laertes admits of eternal revenge’s potential of clouding his judgment after he has slain the murderer of his father, “The foul practice Hath turned itself on me. Lo, here I lie, Never to rise again […] The King’s to blame” (V.ii.337). His hunt for equilibrium in life through retaliation remains unfulfilled as he fails to surmount the sentiments of grief through mortal revenge. The grief continues to prevail within him as he comes to accords
with the shortcomings in his search. Complete equality and balance cannot be achieved in human society as long as human flaws of selfishness and greed thrive. True justice will elude society until human beings are no longer impelled to exploit those at a mental weakness and regrets will not leave the mind until one can be focused on aspirations without being influenced by others.