

Hamlet research paper

Literature, William Shakespeare



Analysis of To Be or Not to Be soliloquy

William Shakespeare is one of the most famous playwrights in the world. His plays are translated in many languages and they are staged more often than any others. Shakespeare is still considered one of the best English writers despite the fact that his plays are more than 400 years old. Characters and plots he developed seem to be modern and up-to-date. He managed to touch the most vital issues of human life – love, friendship, sense of life, existence, antagonism of good and evil, issues of parenthood and motherland. His works are universal and can be adapted to any country and any epoch. Hamlet is actually one of the most often performed and filmed play by William Shakespeare. It describes the story of revenge. Hamlet blames his mother and his uncle in killing his father. Simultaneously, the issues of treachery, love and sense of life are discussed in the play. Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, is one of the most challenging characters in drama (Geoghegan). According to T. S. Eliot, “ We find Shakespeare's Hamlet not in the action, not in any quotations that we might select, so much as in an unmistakable tone” (6), that is why Hamlet role is so difficult to play. Besides, this hero is so complicated because his soliloquies and dialogues are full of philosophical reflections. Hamlet is a 30-years old man, who has already lived half of his life and suddenly everything in his life had been changed. He is not a student anymore; he ought to be the King and he is mourning for his beloved father.

The soliloquy starting with “ to be or not to be?” (Shakespeare, Act 3, Scene I, 58) is very important to the course of the play and to the philosophical development of the character itself. In this scene Hamlet touches on several

different but interrelated important themes of the whole play. First of all, the idea of suicide is raised. In his plays Shakespeare settles the fundamental questions of life and death and in Hamlet he provides his view on suicide and afterlife issues. This episode helps to understand the emotions of the character. In this soliloquy Hamlet reaches conclusions, which similar to those of Descartes (Cogito ergo sum, I think therefore I am). These thoughts lead him to the idea of immortality of the human soul. Yet for Hamlet is not the good news. He prefers his soul not to be immortal (Cutrofello). Hamlet thinks that it is nobler to live the hard life but suicide is more preferable to him. In this scene Hamlet shows his understanding of the injustice of the world and of the value of human life. But for him death is like a sleep and not the end. “ To die: to sleep; No more; and by a sleep to say we end The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks That flesh is heir to” (Shakespeare, Act 3, Scene I, 62-65). It is the end of physical suffering but not the end of existence. Then Hamlet appears uncertain of afterlife and this leads him to the issue of finding the truth and difficulties related to this process because the world is spiritually ambiguous. Furthermore, in this soliloquy Hamlet comes to the conclusion that people are moral because the fear of afterlife. In this life the action is impossible because action means violation that could worsen the afterlife being.

Works Cited

Cutrofello, Andrew. Hamlet’s Negativity: Toward a Performance History of His Conceptual Character. Web. 1 Nov 2013. < http://shakespearequarterly.folger.edu/openreview/?page_id=474>

Eliot, Thomas Stearns. “ Hamlet and His Problems.” *The Sacred Wood*:

<https://assignbuster.com/hamlet-research-paper/>

Essays on Poetry and Criticism. 1922. Web. 1 Nov 2013.

Geoghegan, Tom. “ How to give Hamlet’s ‘ to be or not to be’ new meaning”.

BBC News Magazine. BBC, 23 Sept 2010. Web. 1 Nov 2013.

Shakespeare, William. Hamlet. Web. 1 Nov 2013.

Cutrofello, Andrew. Hamlet’s Negativity: Toward a Performance History of His Conceptual Character. Web. 1 Nov 2013. < http://shakespearequarterly.folger.edu/openreview/?page_id=474>