

Unexamined life is not worth living english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



" The unexamined life is not worth living."--Socrates

Self-Discovery in Drama

Self-Discovery is all about becoming aware of one's true character and potential. Sometimes in drama, Self-Discovery is one of the elements in the core of the play. Throughout the play, every scene incorporates discovery of oneself. When a person puts on a mask, his path to self-discovery becomes longer and more difficult. The reason for this is that all the personalities he pretends to be influence him." Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom." -Aristotle." The fear of the lord is the beginning of wisdom" This statement by Aristotle means that to attain all the knowledge in the world, the first thing you should have is an identity. One of the wisest decisions Hamlet made was to crown young Fortinbras as king of Denmark. He took this decision just after he discovered his true personality. Self-Discovery in Drama is a series of events ultimately leading to discovery of the character's true self without influence from outside like family, friends or acquaintances. However, Hamlet does not give in to influence.

Comparing Self-Discovery of Hamlet and Doctor Faustus

Hamlet's complicated path to self-discovery eventually reaches the end, when Hamlet identifies with himself before dying." Oh, from this time forth, my thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!" In this quote, Hamlet has decided that he will avenge his father's death. Hamlet has two primary duties. One duty is to avenge his father's death and the other duty is to respect society's wishes. If he does not respect the wishes of society and kills the king without proof, he could be hanged. These duties create a

conflict and further adds to Hamlet's identity crisis. This conflict is witnessed many times in Hamlet's soliloquies. However, this conflict was first triggered by the marriage of his mother and Claudius and the pressure to accept Claudius as King. This was one of the factors that also triggered his soliloquies, apart from the death of his father. Hamlet's soliloquies are an integral part to his path to self-discovery. Through his soliloquies, Hamlet's identity is shaped by the thoughts that go through his mind. On the contrary, Doctor Faustus searches for his identity through his desire for all the knowledge in the world. This pact that Doctor Faustus makes with the devil shows us that he is impatient and power-hungry. This also shows us Christopher Marlowe's style of intertwining human emotions in dialogue. Marlowe expresses the character's emotions in the dialogue using techniques. Hamlet constantly is questioning himself and his decisions in his soliloquies. This shows us that he is struggling on with life. He is under pressure to assume his father's identity from the Ghost and society. However, he is trying to discover his own identity so he can avenge his father's death and at the same time become a better ruler than his father. However, fate does not let that happen. Yes, he assumes his own identity but he does not become a ruler, he makes Fortinbras the new ruler of Denmark and he chose wisely. In the play Doctor Faustus, Faustus is contemplating on what he should specialize in. He decides to learn the Dark Arts. However, Faustus does not necessarily search for his self in evil. He chooses an alternate path to discover himself when he realizes that religion and God are not providing him with what he desires and aspires for. However, when he rejects God, he unknowingly rejects his true identity and true knowledge. In

Act 2 Scene 1, Hamlet is reluctant to take action. It seems that he is so obsessed with figuring out the meaning of action that he is rendered unable to act himself. Self-Discovery is also shaped by the growth of the individual. The kind of parents is an important factor to study when studying the Self-Discovery of the individual. Hamlet has parents. As we can see, his identity is affected by his father. Sigmund Freud pointed out that Hamlet has an unconscious desire for his mother. This shows us that his personality has been affected by his mother as well. His father wanted him to take revenge on Claudius. This wish of his father shaped Hamlet's identity a lot. On the contrary, Doctor Faustus does not have parents. This absence of a father and a mother would have had an impact on the path to Self-Discovery for Faustus. Many critics believe that Faustus got what was coming for him in the end, and many pity him like the famous R. M. Dawkins.

Significance of Self-Discovery in Hamlet

Self-Discovery is a topic in literature and drama, which is widely known and written about. Sometimes, like in the case of Hamlet, the theme of Self-Discovery is the core part of the play. The play flows along Hamlet's path of Self-Discovery and Self-Enlightenment. Hamlet's journey to Self-Discovery begins with the encounter with the ghost of his dead father. Much of the play consists of Hamlet's soliloquies in which we see he questions himself and his actions. This shows us that he is searching for an identity. However, at the same time, Hamlet is experiencing pressure from the ghost of his dead father to assume King Hamlet's identity and avenge his death. The murder of his father accelerated and changed the path of Hamlet's self-discovery. The

murder of Hamlet's father was the last trigger to his soliloquies. In Act 3 Scene 1 Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy shows us that Hamlet is confused. He is wondering whether he should continue or end his own life. This shows us that because Hamlet has not yet discovered himself, he is unable to make decisions. As we see in the soliloquy, Hamlet's thoughts waver between two extremes. The famous Sigmund Freud has appreciated the play. Freud identified himself with Hamlet. He started to detect an unconscious desire in Hamlet for his mother. This is another evidence for Hamlet's search for his own identity. The play has been widely affected by religion. The play shows many references to Catholicism and Protestantism, which were Europe's two most powerful theological forces at the time of Shakespeare. Hamlet is a very moral person and he follows the principles that govern his religion and these principles have great impact on his identity. This is shown at many instances in the play. Hamlet hesitates to kill Claudius when he is praying as he fears that Claudius will go to heaven. My thoughts on this are that Hamlet's hesitation is what keeps him human and a Christian. On the contrary, Claudius has rejected the sixth and tenth commandment when he murdered King Hamlet. The Irish Critic, Edward Dowden said, "Hamlet might so easily have been manufactured into an enigma, or a puzzle, and then the puzzle if sufficient pains were bestowed, could be completely taken to pieces and explained. But Shakespeare created it a mystery, and therefore it is forever suggestive; forever suggestive and never wholly explicable." In this quote, Edward Dowden thought that the play epitomized the value of "obscurity"

Significance of Self-Discovery in Doctor Faustus

The play analyses Faustus' inner self. I believe that Marlowe created Faustus to help people identify with a fictional character. And this fictional character is actually representative of a real life person, Johann Faust. However, Doctor Faustus himself cannot identify with anybody or anything. Faustus lives his entire life without an identity. Doctor Faustus is a very gullible person.

Throughout the play, Dr. Faustus is easily persuaded to do anything. For example, in the scenes of the Good Angel and the Bad Angel, the Good Angel always tells Faustus that he can repent and be saved but the Bad Angel convinces him not to. Dr. Faustus is gullible for a number of reasons. The main reason is that he wants all the knowledge and power in the world. This knowledge and power is just a manifestation of his search for identity and self-knowledge. He wants to believe that he can receive the self-knowledge from attaining all the knowledge in the world. However, when he closed the door to heaven and God, he also closed the door to true knowledge. Psalms 111: 10, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom." Doctor Faustus does not fear God. He is on a journey to attain all the wisdom in world. However, as the play also shows he does not find it. The quote tells us that an individual must have some innate fear of the Lord to attain wisdom. Doctor Faustus is a very learned man. During the Elizabethan period, when a person attains the title of Doctor it means that they are at the highest position for knowledge. Faustus has not been represented as a religious man. A strong evidence for this is that he rejects the ideals of religion and God. To a lot of critics and people, it may seem as if Doctor Faustus is the antagonist of the play. However, people like R. M. Dawkins would take pity

on Faustus. R. M. Dawkins famously remarked, "The story of a renaissance man who had to pay the medieval price for being one" Although this statement of R. M. Dawkins is a very simple one, it does get into one of the play's central themes, which is the clash between the medieval age and the emerging renaissance age. This statement means that Doctor Faustus is a man ahead of his time. He has knowledge that is ahead of his time. This could be one of the reasons why he has not found his identity yet. Faustus is a man of the renaissance age. Throughout the play, it seems as if Faustus controls every situation but in reality the outcome at the end is decided by Lucifer and Mephistopheles. By Scene 13, we see that Doctor Faustus has no control over his emotions, feelings or thoughts. This shows us that he had no identity to start with and Lucifer is taking whatever he had away.

Effectiveness of Self-Discovery in Literature

Authors sometimes narrate their own experiences of discovering themselves and sometimes want to show the world how important it is to know one's true self to live life fully. William Shakespeare was one of the prominent dramatists who intertwined the theme of Self-Discovery in almost all of his plays. He showed people that knowing one's true self is knowing one's full potential and purpose in life." Knowing others is intelligence, knowing yourself is true wisdom. Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power."--Lao Tzu However, like in the case of Hamlet, they discover themselves just before death. People like Peter Weiss spend their entire life and career pondering on about self-discovery. Everything they create or write they view it as an instrument for self-discovery. However, I feel that

Christopher Marlowe had not discovered his identity throughout his life.

Many critics believed that if he had lived longer he would have been greater than William Shakespeare.