

Hamlet soliloquies and their analysis

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HAMLET'S SOLILOQUIES & THEIR ANALYSIS In the course of the play, Hamlet has seven long soliloquies. The first of these occurs before he has seen the Ghost. In this soliloquy, Hamlet reveals the grief that has been gnawing at his mind. He wishes that religion did not forbid suicide so that he could kill himself and be rid of this grief. He feels disillusioned with the world. "How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable, Seem to me all the uses of this world".

He deplores (condemns) the fact that his mother should have remarried barely two months after the death of her first husband. This soliloquy shows Hamlet's meditative nature. It also reveals his filial attachment to his dead father whom he speaks highly, and his scorn of his uncle to whom he refers in disparaging terms. His references to Hyperion, Niobe and Hercules show him to be well versed in classical literature. We also note his generalizing tendency when says: "Frailty thy name is woman;" Resolution to avenge his father's murder.

Hamlet's second soliloquy comes just after the Ghost leaves him, after charging him with the duty of taking revenge upon the murderer of his father. Hamlet resolves to wipe out everything else from his memory and to remember only Ghost's command. The manner in which Hamlet here speaks of never forgetting into action and carry out the behest (request) of the Ghost. The Ghost's revelation has stunned him and he refers to his mother as "a most pernicious woman" and to his uncle as a "smiling damned villain".

We again note his generalizing tendency when he says that "one may smile, and smile, and be a villain". Self reproach: In his third soliloquy, Hamlet

bitterly scolds himself for having failed to execute his revenge so far, he calls himself “ a dull and muddy mettled rascal” for his failure, accusing himself of being “ pigeon livered”, an ass who “ like a whore” can only unpack his heart with words and “ And fall a-cursing, like a very drab”. He refers to his uncle as a “ bloody bawdy villain; remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindles villain”. He then dwells upon his plan to stage a play (The Mouse Trap), saying: “ the the play 's the thing Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king” In other words, Hamlet now seeks a confirmation of the Ghost’s charge against Claudius. This is rather strange, because it has taken him long to doubt the authenticity of the Ghost’s version. It is obvious that Hamlet is more a philosopher and less a man of action. On the Horns of Dilemma. Hamlet fourth soliloquy, his most famous and most celebrated, is the most philosophical of all. To be, or not to be: that is the question”. Hamlet asks himself whether it is noble to suffer the cruelties of fate silently or to put up a fight against the misfortunes of life. It would be better perhaps “ to commit suicide” if death were to mean a total extinction of consciousness. But the fear of what may happen to us after death, make us endure the ills and injustices of life. This soliloquy, more than any other reveals the speculative temperament of Hamlet, his irresolute and wavering mind, and his incapacity for any premeditated action of a momentous nature.

His catalogue of the misfortunes of life once again shows his generalizing habit of thought. This soliloquy partly explains Hamlet’s delay in carrying out his purpose, and shows at the same time the mental torture that he has been undergoing because of that delay. We here see a sensitive, reflective person compelled to face situation with which he unable to cope. Decision to

“speak daggers” to his mother. In his fifth soliloquy, Hamlet describes his mood as one in which he could “drink hot blood, and do such bitter business as the day would quake to look on”.

In this mood he can even kill his mother, but he would not follow Nero's example: “Let me be cruel, not unnatural”. He therefore decides to “speak daggers” to his mother but use none. We can well realize Hamlet's story of resentment against his mother but we also know that the man who has not been able to kill his uncle will be incapable of killing his mother because, apart from the fact of her marriage, she has done nothing to deserve that punishment. Evading responsibility. Hamlet's sixth soliloquy shows him shrinking from an act for which he has long been preparing and for which he now gets an excellent opportunity.

Hamlet's reason for not killing his uncle at this moment is that the uncle is at prayers and that by killing him at such a time Hamlet would be sending him straight to heaven. Hamlet decides to wait for an opportunity when his uncle 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 it”. Obviously, Hamlet is evading a responsibility which he has fully accepted. His reasoning here is nothing but a piece of casuistry (misleadingly subtle reasoning). Thus Hamlet's tendency to procrastination is further emphasized in this soliloquy.

Self-Reprieve Again. Hamlet's last soliloquy is again full of self-reproach: “How all occasions do inform against me, And spur my dull revenge!” Three parts of his failure, he says, are due to cowardice, and only one part due to

wisdom. It is to be deplored (condemned) that he only lives yet to say: “ This thing’s to do (meaning his purpose is yet to be accomplished). A man is no better than a beast, if he is content with feeding and sleeping. Hamlet’s dilatoriness is due to “ bestial oblivions”, or to “ some craven (cowardly) scruple (hesitation) of thinking too precisely on the event”.

Having rebuke himself in strong terms, Hamlet forms the following resolve: “ O, from this time forth, My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth! ” This soliloquy, once again emphasizes Hamlet’s irresolution and his meditative temperament. His conscience keeps pricking him and urging him to revenge, but a natural deficiency always obstructs him. His generalizing and universalizing tendency too is seen here once again ” What is a man, If his chief good and market of his time Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more. ” The idea of delay emphasized by the soliloquies.

Hamlet’s soliloquies are foremost in bringing the idea of his delay to our notice. The stress on delay shows also Hamlet’s preoccupation with his role. His life is one to be lived under the imposition (burden) of a great task which he seems unable to fulfill. Excessively speculative, irresolute, scholarly poetic. The soliloquies of Hamlet undoubtedly throw a flood of light on his character and personality. A soliloquy is a device by which Shakespeare reveals to us the inner working of a character’s mind, the secret thoughts and cogitations (meditations) of a character’s mind, the deepest recess of a character’s soul.

Hamlet’s soliloquies surely serve that purpose. These soliloquies not only reveal that Hamlet is given to excessive speculations and that he is therefore

unfit to carry out the task assigned to him, but also unable to understand his reasons for delaying his revenge. Furthermore, these soliloquies show Hamlet's poetic eloquence. Each soliloquy by him is a masterpiece, not only as regards its philosophic content but also as regards its style and expression. They show Hamlet to be a scholar, a philosopher, and a poet. .

Nothing about his relations with Ophelia in these soliloquies. Introspective as he is, Hamlet is constantly analyzing himself inwardly. He is for even looking into himself, delving into his own nature, to seek an explanation' for this or for that, and giving vent to his dissatisfaction, discontent, or frustration. In one important respect, however, these soliloquies do not express Hamlet's mind. In none of these soliloquies does he speak of his feelings or thoughts about Ophelia. While he speaks a good deal about his uncle and, his mother, he says nothing about Ophelia.

The result is that so far as his relations with Ophelia arc concerned, we have to depend only on external evidence. Three powers of the soul dramatized. According to one critic, the first six soliloquies of Hamlet' dramatize the three powers of the soul – namely , memory; understanding, and will – and show how his memory and understanding are opposed to his will, while the seventh soliloquy is concerned with all three powers of the soul though-" the battle in Hamlet's mind is never decided at a conscious level.

Over-analysis of motives. The soliloquies of Hamlet deepen Hamlet's tragic character by portraying him as a “ thinking" man. His excessive introspection checks action by too curious a consideration of the need and justice of . the action contemplated. The soliloquies contain an over-analysis ·of the motives

of the action that is required of him. His mind weighs all that may conceivably be said for and against the course proposed.