



A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SOLILOQUIES USED BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE IN *HAMLET*

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Abstract

Of all William Shakespeare's plays, Hamlet is the most psychologically interpreted play by several critics till modern time. Many critics have made attempts to find out the actual reason of his unnecessary delay in taking revenge. Hence, the soliloquies of Hamlet have been interpreted several times to arrive at the conclusion to know why he delays. Shakespeare has used the device of soliloquies in his other plays like Othello and Macbeth. But Hamlet is psychological play and with a central character like Hamlet who is a very complex character, the use of soliloquies is essential. In the current research work the researcher proposes to critically analyze seven important soliloquies used by Shakespeare in the play Hamlet. The researcher also proposes to attempt to give his own interpretations.

Key Words: Shakespeare, tragedy, Hamlet, Soliloquy

Soliloquy is dramatic device, by which the dramatist makes a character in the drama talk aloud when alone.

The soliloquy is an accepted dramatic convention of great importance and the various uses it has been put to show the strengths and advantages of such a convention. Its advantages are inestimable because it enables a dramatist to convey direct to an audience important information about a particular character: his state of mind and heart, his most intimate thoughts and feelings, his motives and intentions. (Cuddon, 838)

When a character like Hamlet talks, when he is alone, he is not talking to us, or to anybody, but he is only thinking aloud, so that we know what thoughts are going on in the mind of the character. Soliloquies, therefore, help us to understand the mind of the character.

In a play like *Hamlet*, which is psychological, and with a character like Hamlet, who is a very complex character, soliloquies are not only helpful but also very necessary. If,

for example, we remove all the soliloquies put in the mouth of Hamlet, we shall never be able to understand why he delays. If we remove all the soliloquies put in the mouth of Claudius, we would never know what is going on his mind, what he thinks about Hamlet, how he wishes to deal with him, how he feels guilty later on etc. According to Bradley, if we remove all the soliloquies of Hamlet from the play, there is no reason for delay in the play at all. This means that the reasons for delay in the play are psychological, concerned with Hamlet's own internal difficulties.

In a tragedy like Hamlet where the interest is the psychological, soliloquies help us to understand its psychology and reveal to us the conflict in the mind of Hamlet. There is something on and in Hamlet's mind, which prevents him from acting at once. In order to understand the character of Hamlet, it is, therefore, necessary to know what is going on in his mind. We can do this only with the help of his many soliloquies. Hamlet's soliloquies provide the key which would unlock the secrets of his characters. This is the reason why Shakespeare has put so many soliloquies in the mouth of Hamlet. In this wide world of men and women, Hamlet has no one whom he can trust or talk to in full confidence. He must, therefore, unburden himself in his soliloquies when he is by himself.

There are in all seven soliloquies put in Hamlet's mouth at different stages of the play:

(1) His first important soliloquy,

“O, that this too too solid flesh would melt

Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!

Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd

His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!.....”(Hamlet, 21)

occurs in act I scene II, which reveals to us how weary, disillusioned and disgusted with life he is. Hamlet was terribly shocked at the indecent and over-hasty marriage of his mother with his uncle soon after his father's death. This shows the effect of his mother's guilt on Hamlet's mind.. “Hamlet is, essentially, a portrayal of a tortured, depressed young man who loses his way in the labyrinth of his negative thoughts.” (Morin,02)

(2) Hamlet has not yet seen his father's ghost and heard the dreadful revelation about his uncle's guilt. This happens in act I scene V when we have his second soliloquy

“O all you host of heaven ! O earth ! what else ?
 And shall I couple hell ? Oh, fie ! Hold, hold, my
 heart; And you, my sinews, grow not instant old.
 But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee?.....” (Hamlet,47)

this shows how Hamlet is shocked at the revelation and how his mind is upset.
 He is paralyzed by this shock.

(3) His third soliloquy

“Now I am alone.
 O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
 Is it not monstrous that this player here,
 But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,.....” (Hamlet 92)

in act II, scene II, soon after hearing the strolling actor’s speech on Hecuba, shows Hamlet reproaching himself for his delay in taking the revenge against his uncle. The example of the actor stirs him to thoughts of revenge. This shows how Hamlet always requires external stimulus to good or drive him to action. In a mood of bitter self-reproach Hamlet calls himself a rogue, a dull and muddy-mettled rascal and an ass. This of course does not take him any nearer his duty of revenge. He begins now to doubt whether the ghost was really that of his father or merely a devil in disguise to tempt him. He must clear this doubt before he can take any steps against his uncle. Thus, one more reason or excuse has been found to postpone action. He, therefore, thinks of a murder-play, which he would arrange with the help of strolling players. The play then becomes the thing to catch the conscience of the King.

(4) Hamlet’s fourth soliloquy

“To be, or not to be: that is the question:
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,.....” (Hamlet, 98)

And by opposing end them?” in act III, scene I is a precious gem. Weary of life, disillusioned shout men, women and things round him, Hamlet longs for death in order to escape from this

hateful world. Here, Hamlet is in his most characteristic mood, brooding and philosophizing about life and death and life after death. If this is what life is, if this what life has to offer, Hamlet thinks that it is better “not to be” than “to be”. This soliloquy helps us to see Hamlet’s reason for delay- his deep disgust of life. When the whole world is burning, there is no point in trying to save one house from fire. When the whole world is so wicked, the problem can not be solved by killing one wicked man- his uncle. We see here overwhelmed with the problem of the evil in the world. “This soliloquy again emphasizes Hamlet's irresolution and his reflective nature. His conscience keeps pricking him and urging him to his revenge but a natural deficiency in him always thwarts his purpose.” (Jillal, 120)

Again, this soliloquy shows that Hamlet is not a bad critic of himself. He knows why he is not able to act. He knows that “the native hue of resolution sicklies over with the pail cast of thought”. He knows that conscience makes a coward of him.

He thinks too much and cannot go into action without which revenge cannot be taken. His philosophical soliloquies make it a poetic play rather than a realistic one. (Ford, 82)

(5) Hamlet’s fifth soliloquy

'Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes
Out Contagion to this world ; now could I drink hot
blood, And do such bitter business as the day 410
Would quake to look on. Soft ! now to my mother,.....” (Hamlet, 131)

in act III scene II which he speaks just before meeting his mother, and soon after the success of his murder-play shows that Hamlet is still as far from his revenge as ever. In spite of the fact that he has no cause for further delay after successfully catching the conscience of the King. He merely resolves that he would drink hot blood and do such bitter business as the day would quack to look on. This also throws light on his attitude towards his mother. Here, he says that he would speak daggers to her, but use none.

(6) Hamlet’s sixth soliloquy

“Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;
And now I 'll do 't; and so he goes to heaven ;

And so am I revenged. That would be scann'd :
 A villain kills my father; and for that,
 I, his sole son, do this same villain send
 To heaven.....”(Hamlet,135)

in act III scene III shows the conflict in Hamlet's mind on seeing his uncle alone but praying. Hamlet could kill him at once, since his uncle is alone; but he would rather not kill him then, because a man at prayer goes to heaven if killed while praying. Fate gives Hamlet a chance but ironically the chance could not be taken. Hamlet would not sent the murderer of his father to Heaven. Hence, Hamlet has to delay still more."Hamlet's sense of himself as a coward is derived from a crude, simplistic judgement turning on whether or not he has yet taken any action against the man who murdered his father." (Newell, 61)

(7) Hamlet's seventh soliloquy is

“How all occasions do inform against me
 And spur my dull revenge! What is a man,
 If his chief good and market of his time
 Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more. 3 5
 Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
 Looking before and after, gave us not
 That capability and god-like reason
 To fust in us unused.....”(Hamlet, 159)

in act IV, scene IV soon after watching the young Fortinbras, who was leading an army to do his duty towards his dead father. Fortinbras teaches Hamlet a lesson what a son should do for the father. This again shows that Hamlet always requires some external stimulus to stir him to action or the thoughts of action. The spirited action of Fortinbras stands before Hamlet as a contrast with his own ignoble inaction.

The Soliloquies of Hamlet are among the chief glories of the play, according to Betty Bealey. Dr. Bealey goes on to add:

Of the 4,000 lines in Hamlet, about 40 per cent are delivered by Hamlet himself, and of these, his seven soliloquies make up 210 lines. These soliloquies may be compared to seven pillars that hold up the arches of the play. It is significant that there is no soliloquy in the last act. (Beatley, xxxii)

Without these soliloquies, it is almost impossible to understand the character of Hamlet, for it is these soliloquies that throw light on the darkest corners and aspects of his character. “Without the soliloquies, Hamlet would remain an entertaining revenge drama.” (Dreams, 2008) In each soliloquy, we observe that Hamlet laments his failure to take action against Claudius- his father's killer. It gives the compendiums a sapience into his capability to suppose and his failure to act on it. His cerebral struggles with death, honour and tone- loathing elicit sympathy for his essential virtuousness. After the analysis of these soliloquies, we find the spiritual crisis that Hamlet went through. Since Hamlet is a very complex character, Shakespeare has used the soliloquies in order to reduce his complexity. Thus, the seven soliloquies of Hamlet are relevant because they allow the reader to follow the progression of Hamlet’s spiritual crisis and they also help to explore his complex mental state to the audience.

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