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Hamlet’s Soliloquies

Literature has always revolved around the concept of an emotional journey. Many of the most prominent literary characters found in human culture derive their fame from an incredible emotional journey. In William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the character of Hamlet is undoubtedly the most well known for his emotional progression. As an intelligent young prince of Denmark who recently lost his father, Hamlet presents himself as a brooding, melancholy character tormented by the grief he feels he faces alone. Upon visitation by his father’s ghost, Hamlet realizes the reason he is the lone mourner of his father is because his father was murdered by Hamlet’s uncle—the current king. The ghost assigns poor Hamlet the task of avenging his father’s death. However, in order to accomplish this task, Hamlet must change from a contemplative, dejected character into a man of action, a decisive and resolute person. By tracing his soliloquies throughout the play, the reader is able to observe the progression of Hamlet’s character from gloomy and sulky to purposeful and determined.

When the reader first meets young prince Hamlet, he seems to be the only one grieving over the relatively recent loss of his father, the former king of Denmark. In his first soliloquy, after being denied the chance to return to Wittenberg and being told that he has grieved for too long on his father’s death, Hamlet reveals that he is angry with his mother and upset over his father’s death when he claims that his father is “But two months dead: nay, not so much, not two” and his mother has married his “father’s brother, [who is] no more like [Hamlet’s] father Than [Hamlet is] to Hercules: within a month” (1.2.140-155). With this statement, he reveals that his deepening depression is the result of his mother’s hasty remarriage to his own uncle. He finds his uncle inferior in every way to his father, like “Hyperion to a satyr”, or a god to a beast (1.2.142). With these statements, Hamlet also reveals that he yearns for death. He wishes “that the Everlasting had not fix’d His canon ‘gainst self-slaughter” and he finds the world “weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable” (1.2.134-135). The death of his father compounded with the speedy and incestuous marriage of his mother to his uncle has left him in a state of melancholy. This soliloquy shows the meditative nature of Hamlet and provides the reader with evidence towards the fact that he is not a murderous, revengeful, or hasty person. Hamlet is one who broods and obsesses over every aspect of an idea before taking action.

Hamlet again asserts his self loathing personality after watching an actor burst into tears while reciting a speech describing the story of Pyrrhus and Hecuba. In this soliloquy, Hamlet asks “What’s Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, That he should weep for her? What would he do, Had he the motive and the cue for passion That I have? He would drown the stage with tears and cleave the general ear with horrid speech [...] Yet I, A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak, Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause, And can say nothing” (2.2.564-574). Hamlet bitterly scolds himself for having taken no action to seek his father’s revenge. Within this monologue, the reader also begins to see a slight change in Hamlet’s psyche. Though he still seems to ruminate over everything rather than take action, he is beginning to despise that part of his own nature. He feels ashamed at being a coward who “must, like a whore, unpack [his] heart with words, And fall a-cursing, like a very drab, A scullion” (2.2.592-594). With this statement, the reader can see that Hamlet has begun to hate himself almost on an equal level to the hatred he feels towards his uncle. This soliloquy signals Hamlet’s progression into a vengeful state of mind.

The final revelation that completes Hamlet’s metamorphosis into a decisive and determined character occurs after he unexpectedly meets one of Fortinbras’ Captains while he waits to board a ship to go to England. After hearing that Fortinbras is leading his army to fight the Poles over piece of land with no real value, Hamlet sees that Norway is being “Led by a delicate and tender prince, Whose spirit with divine ambition puff’d Makes mouths at the invisible event, Exposing what is mortal and unsure To all that fortune, death and danger dare, For even an egg-shell” and wonders where that leaves him “That have a father kill’d, a mother stain’d, Excitements of [his] reason and [his] blood, And let all sleep” (4.4.51-62). Here, Hamlet is faced with the simple understanding that he, who has so many reasons to fight and shed blood, does nothing but sit and brood. In contrast, he sees that Fortinbras is willing to risk his own life and the lives of twenty thousand of his own soldiers over a mere scrap of land. He convinces himself that if Fortinbras is fighting for no reason other than honor, he is justified in doing the same. Hamlet’s final statement in this soliloquy marks the completion of his psychological transformation; he concludes that from this point on, his “thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth” (4.4.69). Hamlet halts his solemn contemplation over the immorality of murder as a means of vengeance, and finally accepts it as his duty. The young prince’s final statement in this monologue represents the complete alteration of his personality. He no longer feels the need to think over whether he is justified in seeking revenge for his father’s murder by killing his uncle; Hamlet finally feels that it is necessary and proper for him to seek revenge.

In William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the main character undergoes a metamorphosis from a brooding and melancholy man to a decisive and resolute character in the final act. At first, Hamlet expresses only his suicidal thoughts and his disgust with the actions of his mother and uncle. These contemptuous feelings lead Hamlet into a bought of self loathing. He begins to hate himself for his inability to take action without thought. Finally, the young prince’s self loathing spurs him to abandon his thoughts of morality and become a bloodthirsty and determined man. In this sense, Hamlet undergoes one of the most famous emotional journeys of all time.