

The Significance of Soliloquy as a Literary Technique in Hamlet

” أهمية المناجاة بوصفها وسيلة أدبية في مسرحية هاملت ”

**Asst.Lecturer
Khalid Jaber Al-Ogaili
University of Kufa/ College of Arts**

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الملخص

في مسرحية "هاملت" يوجد احد عشر مناجاة ل "هاملت" و الملك "كلاوديس" و "اوفيليا". لكن في هذا البحث سيكون التركيز على المناجاة التي قيلت من قبل الشخصية الرئيسية "هاملت" وعددها سبعة .
تمكنا هذه الوسيلة الأدبية من معرفة الاوجة النفسية و النزعات و المشاعر والأحاسيس للشخصية الرئيسة "هاملت" .
عن طريق هذه الوسيلة الأدبية ستتضح الأسباب التي منعت هاملت من الانتقام على الرغم من ان أحداث هذه المسرحية تدور حول الانتقام .
كان هنالك عدة فرص لقتل كلاوديس لكن هاملت لم ينتهز هذه الفرص وكان مترددا بعض الشيء على الرغم من أنه كان متأكدا بان كلاوديس هو الجاني .

Abstract

In the tragedy of Hamlet by William Shakespeare , there are eleven soliloquies uttered by the protagonist of the play "Hamlet" , king Claudius and Ophelia . In this paper , the emphasis will be on the soliloquies uttered by the central character of the play "Hamlet"

He said seven soliloquies , these soliloquies show the feelings , the tendencies and psychological aspects of Hamlet . The reader will be familiar with the reasons which prevent Hamlet to take

revenge , although the play is about revenge . There are several opportunities to kill Claudius but Hamlet does not make use of them . He is hesitant to take revenge although he is sure that his uncle is the murderer of his father.

1.Introduction

1.1Definition and Origin

Soliloquy is a literary device according to which a character brings out the inner complex feelings by speaking to himself / herself. The audience is supposed to hear it but not the other characters. Characters are individuals with their own complex thoughts and emotions and these thoughts and emotions can be shared with others. The word soliloquy derived from Latin words "solus" which means alone and "loqui" which means to speak . Soliloquy is a long speech uttered by a single character alone on the stage in which he/she expresses his/her thoughts and feelings .It enables the dramatist to convey directly to the audience the important information about a particular character ; his/her state of mind and heart , his intimate thoughts and feelings , his motives and intentions .(Cuddon, 1999: 838)

1.2 Soliloquy as a Technique

It's believed that Shakespeare is known for his deep understanding of human nature with diverse feelings, emotions and passions both positive and negative involved in it.

In his tragedy Hamlet , the title character has seven key soliloquies . Through careful analysis of the soliloquies , one can trace the spiritual crisis that Hamlet underwent . Thus , the seven key soliloquies are relevant because they allow the reader to follow the progression of Hamlet's spiritual crisis. The soliloquies are given to him to reveal his complex psychological state. It's the tragedy of moral frustration. The tension between Hamlet's need for revenge and the question of morality, guilt, justice as well as his uncle and mother's position is vividly dramatized.(Wikipedia,2012:online)

1.3 Examples

Shakespeare gives soliloquies to complex character in order to bring out the secret feelings and plans which the character cannot share with other characters . In the tragedy of Othello, the antagonist Iago is given soliloquies .Since he is a scheming villain, his deceptions, treachery, conspiracies and pretensions can best be revealed through soliloquies. It helps to show that side of the character's personality which is hidden from the other characters who are the victims of Iago's villainy, (Bradley, 1957: 43)

In the tragedy of Hamlet, the majority of soliloquies are given to the protagonist, who often thereby revealing his doubts, dilemmas, fears, anger and musings on questions of morality. Hamlet is not the acting type so the reflective or contemplative side of his personality is best brought out through his soliloquies' The central character of a tragedy may himself choose a course of action in blindness or ignorance " (Margeson, 1967 :4)

2. The Tragic Action and Revenge

Hamlet is a revenge tragedy. It is a tragedy of reflection and moral sensitivity . The protagonist is very reflective and too sensitive so he is unfit for taking revenge through action . Hamlet's father has been murdered by his uncle and his mother marries the criminal after her husband's death. As suggested by the ghost, Hamlet has to take revenge his father's murderer. As he is a person with a high degree of moral sensitivity and a philosophic bent of mind, he thinks about whether evil can undo evil and not remain evil. Hamlet wants to find out whether the ghost has told the truth or not. 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,1961: 82)

Hamlet is a play whose main theme is to bring to light what is hidden . It is not perhaps so clear why Shakespeare sacrifices the effect of making the ghost's meeting with Hamlet coincide with his first appearance .There is more of Shakespeare himself in this play than in any of his others . This play is the only revenge tragedy of

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its period .It's the only play in which a real tragic conflict arises directly out of the imposition of the task of revenge upon its hero .In other plays dealing with the subject of revenge , the ethics of revenge are raised directly as an issue bearing on the hero's conduct and he/she makes his/her decision either for or against revenge . (Harrison, 1987 :220)

3. Hamlet's Soliloquies

Shakespeare's writings in the tragedy of Hamlet reveal seven in depth soliloquies spoken by Hamlet. In these soliloquies, Shakespeare shows the portions of Hamlet's personality. The analysis of the soliloquies help readers better understand the exact mind of Hamlet. At the conclusion of the play, the readers feel as if they know Hamlet and his soliloquies contribute too much of that understanding. Hamlet is one of the most complex characters ever created. His intricacy can be seen in the amount of soliloquies he speaks throughout the play. His soliloquy 'to be or not to be that is the question'(Act 111,scene i) is one of the most remarkable soliloquies that serves to highlight the state of indecision in which he finds himself. Hamlet's soliloquies show a progress in his power to convert the personal into general , (Spenser,1942:108)

Each one of Hamlet's soliloquies reveals his innermost thoughts and gives the reader or the audience an insight of his feeling at that time. Hamlet's quartet of soliloquies illustrates how he is initially indecisive, but eventually makes a decision to take revenge against his uncle. The critic John Holloway said:

" Hamlet's soliloquies are foremost in bringing the idea of the delay to our notice . But the stress on delay in the soliloquies also shows how Hamlet is preoccupied with his role , a role undertaken by him with what might almost be termed preordained course and end" , (1987: 122

3.1 Grief and Anger

Hamlet's first soliloquy shows that he is angry with his mother and upset over his father's death. It also expresses Hamlet's deepest thoughts. He can not stand the world that he lives in. He wants to

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relieve himself of all his responsibilities and return to a time of tranquility. He has been raised as noble man and he can't find the heart to abandon responsibilities. Through suicide, he feels that he can escape all of his problems. The beliefs of his father reject this idea . His problems seem to increase: his father's death, his widowed mother marrying his uncle and his confusing relationship with Ophelia. The first soliloquy introduces Hamlet's first thoughts of suicide. It also enables readers to know how much he disproves of his mother-uncles' relationship,(Jilall, 1987: 112)

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
But two months dead: nay, not so much, not two:
So excellent a king; that was, to this,
Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!(Act I, ii)

In this soliloquy, Hamlet reveals the grief that has been grown in his mind. He wishes that religion does not forbid suicide so that he could kill himself and get rid of this grief .Hamlet's first soliloquy reveals him to be thoroughly disgusted with Gertrude, Claudius, and the world in general. "How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable, seem to me all the uses of this world" he said.(Act 1.ii) He is saddened by the death of his father, who he admired as a king and husband to his mother. His grief over his father's death is compounded by his mother's hasty marriage to Claudius,(ibid : 119)

Hamlet did not think that his uncle was as a great king as his father. In his soliloquy , he said :So excellent a king , that was however Hamlet's anger towards his mother was more intense . "

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King Hamlet was a spirit , but the spirit of a majestic king and a great soldier", (Willson,1935 :58)

Hamlet deplores the fact that his mother has remarried barely two months after his father's death , and she has married a man much inferior to the husband she lost . He considers this marriage as incestuous affairs .

This soliloquy shows the meditative nature of Hamlet and prepares the readers for the prolonged delay in his executing the command of the ghost for revenge .Also, it sheds light on the character of Hamlet's dead father who was an excellent king and a loving husband . " It is in the soliloquies that we find practically all the evidence for the view of Hamlet as one who delays to act " ,(Ford, 1961: 203)

3.2 Appearance of the Ghost

O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else?
And shall I couple hell? O, fie! Hold, hold, my heart;
Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
That youth and observation copied there;
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmix'd with baser matter: yes, by heaven!
O most pernicious woman!
O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!
My tables,—meet it is I set it down,
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;
At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark:(Act i. v)

In this soliloquy, Hamlet speaks to his father's ghost, and his father bids him farewell and asks Hamlet to remember him. Hamlet states "Yea, from the table of my memory/ I'll wipe away all trivial fond records". (Act 1, v)

Hamlet says that he will forget everything he has learned ever since he was a child so he may remember his father's ghost. He

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makes revenge as his main purpose in life . Bloom said " Hamlet is more aware than we are that he has been assigned a task wholly inappropriate for him ". (1999: 388)

Hamlet has been stunned by the revelation and echoes of the ghost's words . He resolves to wipe out everything else from his memory and to preserve in it the ghost's "commandment" only . The way Hamlet speaks of never permitting himself to forget the ghost's words , makes us think that Hamlet will soon plunge into action and carry out the behest of the ghost . Now, he refers to his mother as a " most pernicious woman" and to his uncle as a "villain" a "smiling damned villain" . (Act i. v)

3.3 Hamlet's hesitation

Now I am alone.

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!

Is it not monstrous that this player here

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

O, vengeance!

Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,

That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,

Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,

Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,

And fall a-cursing, like a very drab,

With this slave's offal: bloody, bawdy villain!

Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!(Act 11, ii)

In this soliloquy, Hamlet bitterly scolds himself for his continuing failure to execute his revenge . The player is shedding tears while reciting a speech descriptive of Hecuba's grief over the death of her husband stings Hamlet to make him scold himself for inaction . Freud writes: is able to do anything – except take vengeance on the man Hamlet

who did away with his father and took that father's place with his mother , the man who shows him the repressed wishes of his

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own childhood realize. Thus the loathing which should drive him on to revenge is replaced in him by self-reproaches, by scruples of conscience ,which remind him that he himself is literally no better than the sinner whom he wishes to punish .(1913: 33)

Hamlet regards himself dull and muddy-metalled rascal who has so far done nothing to avenge the murder of his father .He feels ashamed of being a coward who can only "unpack" his heart with words and "fall acursing like a very drab" (Act 11, ii). He vents his anger upon his uncle by referring to him as "a bloody , bawdy villain ; remorseless , treacherous, lecherous , kindless villain" (Act 11, ii). It is hard to believe that Hamlet could not have found an opportunity to kill the king . If it were for a lack of opportunity that he has not acted so far , he would have mentioned the fact in this soliloquy .The soliloquy, for all its felicity of phrasing is redundant . It shows nothing and the readers do not know already except that the prince has become unrealistic .A prisoner under guard and on his way to England , he clearly does not have the means he speaks of . For the audience eager to learn whether he will find those means and thus avoid the ignominious fate Claudius has planned for him The soliloquy is anticlimactic and disappointing,(Jillal, 1987: 117)

This soliloquy depicts Hamlet's arrival at a state of vengeful behaviour through an internal process. Hamlet moves through states of depression and procrastination as he is caught up in the aftermath of the murder of his father and the marriage of his mother to his uncle.

The soliloquy serves to effectively illustrate the inner nature of Hamlet's character and develop the theme of revenge . Cohen said ; "revenge is an individual response to an intolerable wrong or a public insult ". It is clear that what prevented him is the natural deficiency . It is the natural deficiency that makes him ask ; "Am I a coward ?" Hamlet condemns himself in round terms for his inaction and for merely indulging in words and curses "like a whore" . This

makes it clear that we are dealing with a philosopher not with a man of action, (Cohen ,1986 : 1070)

3.4 Philosophy of Revenge

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,
And by opposing end them? 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, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep; (Act 111, i)

This is the most famous soliloquy because it is the most philosophical of all . In this soliloquy ,there is a mental debate .

Hamlet finds himself on the horns of a dilemma ; "To be or not to be: that is the question" . He asks which of the two alternatives is nobler whither silently to suffer the cruelties of fate or to put up a fight against the misfortunes of life .What prevents a man from committing suicide is that he does not know what is the result for him after death . It is the fear of what may happen to us after death that makes us endure the ills and injustices of life ,(Encyclopedia, 2011: online)

This soliloquy reveals the speculative temperament of Hamlet , irresolute and wavering mind and his incapacity for any premeditated action of a momentous nature . It also has a universal appeal because Hamlet is speaking for all human beings . There are occasions in every man's life when he feels a strong desire to put an end to his life, but he is prevented from doing so by several considerations including those specifically mentioned by Hamlet .The dramatic purpose of this soliloquy is to explain Hamlet's delay

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in carrying out his purpose and to show at the same time the mental torture that he has been undergoing because of his failure to have carried out that purpose ,(ibid)

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
Would quake to look on. Soft! now to my mother.
O heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom:
Let me be cruel, not unnatural:
I will speak daggers to her, but use none;
My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites;
How in my words soever she be shent,
To give them seals never, my soul, consent!(Act 111, iii)

Hamlet is at this moment in a mood in which he could "drink hot blood, and do such bitter business as the day would quake to look on " . (Act 111, iii) . In this mood, he could even kill his mother . There is nothing remarkable in Hamlet's decision .He is incapable of killing the murderer of his father and he would not kill his mother because she has done nothing to deserve death . In fact, it is strange that such a thought (of killing his mother) should arise in his mind . He has a sufficient reason to hate and detest her, but he has no reason to kill her .(Hibbard, 1987: 65)

3.5 Vengeance

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:
When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed;

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At gaming, swearing, or about some act
That has no relish of salvation in't;(Act iii, iv)

In this soliloquy, Hamlet is prevented to kill the king at this stage. He thinks by killing him at his prayer, he would be in heaven. The first five words 'Now might I do it' show that he has no effective desire to do it. For Hamlet, killing the murderer of his father when that murderer is at prayers would be no revenge at all because the victim at this moment is in the direct communication with God and he would be saved. Hamlet tells himself that he will wait for opportunity when the king 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". (Act iii, iv)

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.
To hide the slain? O, from this time forth,

My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!(Act iv, iv)

A man is no better than a beast if he is satisfied only with sleeping and feeding himself. God gives reason to human beings so that they may make use of it. What is it, Hamlet asks, that has prevented him from carrying out his purpose for so long. "Oh, from this time forth, /My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!" (Act iv, iii). 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, 1987: 120)

Hamlet's soliloquies are pertinent to the play because they allow the reader to connect with the characters in a way that can not

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be achieved through primarily events that occur in the play. They are beneficial in disclosing the most intimate thoughts of the characters . "It is not independent theme and the things that Hamlet endured are more important than the changes in himself that his endurance brings about", (Tillyard, 1950: 25)

4. Conclusions

Shakespeare's play Hamlet is comprised of many themes and varying points of view. While Hamlet is chiefly a play of revenge, it goes beyond this simple theme and concentrates on the unique and thoughtful nature of the prince . Hamlet does not so much pursue his revenge against his father's murderer as he is swept to it from the events occurring throughout the play . When he kills Claudius and Laertes, it is because he accidentally came to have the poisoned tip sword, not because he planned it that way. There are two powers in Hamlet, one urges him to take revenge and the other urges him to delay the revenge . It is clearly evident in some of his soliloquies when he states a philosophy about death and revenge .

In each soliloquy , Hamlet laments his failure to take action against his father's murderer . It gives the readers an insight into his ability to think and his failure to act on it. His psychological struggles with death, honour and self-loathing evoke sympathy for his inherent goodness.

The soliloquy is an essential means in the play of Hamlet . It brings the audience into the character's consciousness and gives the readers the reflection of the most profound thoughts and emotions of the characters . Each soliloquy shows a different side of Hamlet's psyche . Without these soliloquies, the play would lose its vital meaning . Drama is something public by its nature so that soliloquy helps to bring to light the private side of a character's personality and it is the only way in which the character is free to say and

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reveal whatever he wants. It is the most appropriate formula for revealing the complex thoughts in the mind of characters .

Through careful analysis of these soliloquies , one can trace the spiritual crisis that Hamlet underwent . Because he is a very complex character, Shakespeare inserts 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 bring out his complex mental state.

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