Hamlet: Finding Courage To Die Essay, Research Paper

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In William Shakespeare’s “Hamlet” we see a young man paralyzed with

grief over his father. So much so that he is believed to have gone mad. Hamlet

is such a complex character that one must look deeply to find what drives him.

Did he really have the courage to kill the king or was it madness? Hamlet’s

character will be illuminated by explaining both soliloquies and finally Hamlet

himself.

“To be, or not to be, that is the question,” (Beaty, 1348) is one of

the most famous and well known excerpts from the play “Hamlet.” What most

people do not realize is the significance it has in the portrayal of the

character Hamlet. During this soliloquy Hamlet is debating his fate. Hamlet is

asking himself whether it is more noble, in the mind, to passively accept and

suffer through all the pains of life fate throws at him, or to actively destroy,

in death, these numerous troubles, and ultimately end his pain. Hamlet is

questioning whether it is better to live in a world where he cannot see any

goodness or take his own life. Hamlet has a very intense, philosophical

personality. For this reason, he cannot take his life because he does not know

what happens after one dies. He is not positive of an afterlife, therefore he

doesn’t have the courage to end his life.

“Now might I do it prat,” (Beaty, 1363) is a soliloquy in which we see a

shift in Hamlet’s rationalization. Hamlet, as his fathers only son, is seeking

revenge for his fathers death, but is afraid that a quick death for Claudius

would not be enough. Hamlet feels that waiting until Claudius is in an immoral

situation would make him suffer in death because he would not be allowed to

repent for his sins. During this soliloquy Hamlet is caught up in his plot for

revenge and has foregone, for the moment, his plan of suicide.

The contradictions in these two soliloquies sheds much needed light on

Hamlet’s personality. Hamlet is very outraged by the immoral actions of some of

the other characters. He is deeply offended by his mothers hasty marriage to

her brother-in-law and king. Hamlet begs his mother to stop being intimate with

Claudius and to think more upon her late husband. This shows that Hamlet has a

very clear perception of right and wrong. He also shows this characteristic by

being suspicious and even hurt by his childhood friends loyalty to Claudius.

Even though Hamlet is despondent over his fathers death, he keeps in mind his

moral convictions and sets out to right what he sees as a wrong doing towards

his father, and ultimately his family.

The plays tragic ending is just more proof that Hamlet was bound by his

own ethics to avenge his fathers wrongful death. Hamlet’s character traits are

very deeply ingrained and he does what he must to keep those traits from being

exploited by what he sees as unethical people.

Works Cited

Shakespear, William. “Hamlet.” The Norton Introduction to Literature. Ed.

Beaty, Hunter, Paul. New York: W.W. Norton, 1995. 1306-1405.