Hamlet Review Essay, Research Paper

Hamlet

Antiheroism has always been an interesting aspect of a character that

authors have chosen to illustrate. In literature, there has been countless

antiheroic characters, from Randle McMurphy in One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s

Nest and Allie Fox in The Mosquito Coast, to others as famous as Robin Hood

and … By literary definition, an antihero is the “hero” of the play or

novel, but has negative attributes which separate him or her from the

classic hero such as Superman. Such negative aspects may include a violent

nature, use of coarse language, or self serving interests which may

inadvertently depict the protagonist as a hero since the result of serving

those interests may be the betterment of society or an environment. In

William Shakespeare’s Hamlet, the protagonist, Hamlet, is depicted as an

antihero. One main factor which gives Hamlet such a label is that he draws

sympathy, as well as admiration, from the reader since Hamlet feels the

pain of losing his father along with the burden and obstacles in avenging

his murder.

?

Act four places a special emphasis on Hamlet’s intelligence. In scene

two, Hamlet is very insolent and rude towards Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

with such phrases as,

?

That I can keep your counsel and not, mine own. Beside, to be

demanded of a sponge, what replication should be made by the son of a

king? (IV, ii, 12-14)

?

The reference to the sponge reflects the fact that Rosencrantz and

Guildenstern are easily ordered by the king and do not have minds of their

own. Hamlet does not like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern since they are

servants of the Claudius, Hamlet’s mortal enemy. The reader does not like

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern either which causes the reader to side with

Hamlet.

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Another incident of Hamlet’s high intelligence is shown when he Hamlet

tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern,

?

I am glad of it: a knavish sleeps in a foolish ear. (IV, ii,

24-25)

?

This statement leaves Rosencrantz and Guildenstern more or less confused.

Hamlet is clearly more clever than the two of them combined and is able to

toy with them.Hamlet has an excellent command of the language and because

of it, can use words to the point that those around him will not understand

and may label him as crazy.

?

Hamlet shows another example of his cleverness, this time towards

Claudius, when he says,

?

I see a cherub that sees them. But, come; for England! Farewell,

dear mother. (IV, iii, 49-50)

?

The cherub, or the angel, gives Hamlet a sense of superiority over

Claudius. Having an angel at one’s side would be a definite sign of power,

which is exactly what Hamlet tries to maintain over Claudius in their

constant power struggle. Just when Claudius thinks he controls Hamlet, it

is really Hamlet who has the upper hand over Claudius.

?

There are very strong philosophical references made by Hamlet in this

act regarding life and death. Hamlet tells Claudius,

?

Your worm is your

only emperor for diet: we fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat

ourselves for maggots: your fat king and your lean beggar is but

variable service, two dishes, but to one table: that’s the end. (IV,

iii, 21-26)

?

This statement id a reference to the food chain, and in turn, a reflection

on the meaning of life. It illustrates the equality of men in that whether

one is born to be a king or a beggar, when one dies, we are all equal.

Worms and maggots do not treat anybody differently once one is dead and

buried.

?

The final scene draws the greatest sympathy towards Hamlet even though

he is not even in the scene. The forces of Claudius and Laertes have

combined against Hamlet. Claudius states,

?

To an exploit now ripe in my device, Under the which he shall not

choose but fall, And for his death no wind of blame shall breathe; But

even his mother shall unchange the practice, And call it accident.

(IV, vii, 65-69)

?

Claudius is willing to undertake any measures necessary to eliminate

Hamlet, to the point that it does not matter whether or not it hurts

Gertrude in any way. This scene depicts Hamlet as the victim, much like two

bullies picking on a smaller child in school, since the king, with the aid

of Laertes, is out to kill Hamlet, this time with a passion. Much like a

political revolutionary, Hamlet has the system against him and is facing

death because of his loyalty and honour towards his father.

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The fact that Hamlet’s life is not indeed in jeopardy attributes to

his “hero” status. In addition, his only fault is the desire to avenge his

father’s murder, an act considered completely honourable by the reader.

However, Hamlet’s negative attributes include his rudeness towards others,

including the fair Ophelia, and a violent nature as shown when he kills

Polonius, albeit accidently, and shows no remorse, causing a

reclassification from the classic hero, to the more appropriate label of

antihero.