

Example by StudyDriver

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Theme of Death in Hamlet Example

Shakespeare's Hamlet-- solemn tones of questioning existence and a romance within a tragedy-- a solemn man's story, mixed with a fiery ambition for revenge, with a trail of blood leading to it. In Scene III, pages 56-88, Hamlet performs his famous soliloquy, "To be or not to be, that is the question..." Hamlet's soliloquy is full of deep thoughts of existential crisis, and the indecisiveness of Hamlet with his life decisions.

The tone of Hamlet's first soliloquy starts as sorrowful and depressing, but later on turns bitter and hateful due to his mother's relationship with his uncle. Shakespeare's use of words such as flat, stale, and weary contributes to the tone of sorrowful thinking. The long, drawn out sentences also create a tone of distress and panic, as if he is rambling. These factors can be concluded to a troubled mind, battling with the decision of death. Hamlet during his soliloquy bounces between being satisfied with answers, and then questioning his conclusions again, in a never ending cycle. This nervous indecisiveness matches with Hamlet's characteristics of not being able to act upon his thoughts.

Hamlet proposes the question, "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" (III.i.59-61) clearly

showing his troubling thoughts of death. The imagery of a “sea of troubles” really portrays that Hamlet’s mind is like a ship lost at sea, beaten and weary with every oncoming wave of emotion. Hamlet asks such a question in a logical way, but he is still left without an answer of whether the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” can be proven since life after death is a mystery. Hamlet then ponders about the nature of his death and proposes that it may be like a deep slumber, which at first seems to be a redeemable answer, until he speculates on what will come in such a deep sleep, “To sleep: perchance to dream:—ay there’s the rub; / For in that sleep of death what dreams may come” (III.i.68-69). The “dream” that he fears is the agony that the afterlife might bring. Since there is no way to prove that there will be a weight lifted from his shoulders from his sufferings through death, he ponders about the possibility of death again.

Hamlet ponders about the sufferings men are prone to in their life, which makes it seem as though he is contemplating suicide yet again. “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” (3, 1, 56-60). In this quotation, Hamlet questions his validity and if he should live and suffer the hardships, or kill himself in order to end the suffering. Again, the imagery of a “sea of troubles” is portrayed, but in this circumstance Hamlet questions if he should fight against the current of emotions and life troubles. Alas, Hamlet believes that life is so closely connected with suffering, therefore fighting against the “sea of troubles” seems to be a lost cause. The “whips and scorn of time, Th'oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, The pangs of disprized love, the law's delay, The insolence of office, and the spurns That patient merit of th'unworthy takes” (3, 1, 70-74) are the only thing he sees in life, he does not get the satisfaction from living through the good moments life gives.

By the end of this soliloquy, he realizes, “But that dread of something after death, / The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn / No traveler returns—puzzles the will / And makes us rather bear those ills we have” (III.i.81-84). Even though at this last moment Hamlet realizes that many choose life over death because of the mystery of an uncertain afterlife, the soliloquy remains as an example of Hamlet’s deep contemplation about the reasons for death and suicidal tendencies.