

Hamlet: A Moral Man Essay

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In Shakespeare's Hamlet, the titular hero and tragic figure of the play constantly finds himself unable to act on the Ghost's instructions to take revenge on King Claudius despite the compelling reasons he realizes for doing so. The reason for this delay is Hamlet's tragic flaw – his tendency towards thought and introspection rather than impulse and action. Because of this flaw, [Hamlet](#) is unable to ignore the moral aspects of his actions and “thereby becomes the creature of mere meditation, and [he] loses his natural power of action” (Coleridge, 343).

Hamlet is not a man of action; rather, he is a man of thought. Passion and extreme anger are simply not natural emotions for Hamlet, and consequently, he finds himself unable to maintain any of these emotions for an extended period of time. Coleridge mentions this, stating, “In Hamlet [Shakespeare] seems to have wished to exemplify the moral necessity of a due balance between our attention to the objects of our senses, and our meditation on the workings of our minds,- an equilibrium between the real and the imaginary worlds” (344). It is this equilibrium that Hamlet is unable to achieve as he strays passionately into the real world then falls back into the realm of the mind, usually due to moral or philosophical speculation. In his first soliloquy, Hamlet is extremely depressed, and speaks very passionately about his wish to commit suicide. However, he realizes that the law of

God has forbidden “self-slaughter” (1.2.136) and consequently he cannot bring himself to violate his own moral code by taking action and killing himself. Later in Act One, after hearing the Ghost’s revelation that he was murdered, Hamlet promises to take his revenge as quickly as he can. He asks the Ghost to...

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...ever, Hamlet cannot figure out that it really is his “craven scruple / Of thinking too precisely on th' event” (4.4.42-3) that has been preventing him from taking action.

Hamlet naturally tends towards over-thinking everything he does and makes himself too aware of the larger moral implications of any act to perform it. Consequently, he hesitates and delays until circumstances force his hand after much procrastination. Hence, as Coleridge writes, “we see a great, an almost enormous, intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real action consequent upon it” (344).

Works Cited

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. Lectures and Notes on Shakspeare and Other English Poets. London: George Bell and Sons, 1904. pp.342-368. Print.

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