**The Soliloquies – Sample Essay**

**The soliloquies in Hamlet do not, as soliloquies sometimes can, hold up the action of the play. They are in the fullest sense, dramatic, part of the action. Discuss this judgement with reference to two or three soliloquies.**

Shakespeare’s soliloquies in Hamlet differ radically from their common convention as inessential speeches to augment audience understanding. On the contrary, they are just as important, if not more so, as the segments where character interaction occurs. Without the soliloquies, the play would be vacuous and sporadic. Highly dramatic, they give it momentum; propel it forward to new and exciting levels by influencing plot, characterisation and mood, as well as expressing key themes. This is primarily based on the fact that much of Hamlet involves a struggle with the self; there are conflicts between characters, but there are also individual, existential, psychological conflicts. Hamlet’s highly dramatic second and third soliloquies are two such arias. Hence, in Hamlet, soliloquies should not be considered standalone speeches as they are integral to play action.

Hamlet’s soliloquies both influence are influenced by plot. It is through the soliloquies that the intrinsic theme of Hamlet’s procrastination is extended and realised by the audience. If he did not constantly remind us of his inaction through self-directed harangues, the audience would scarcely notice his procrastination nor realise the extent to which he agonises over his inexplicable delay. The first and second soliloquies function in bringing this to light. The former does this through Hamlet’s violent criticism of himself– “I am pigeon-liver’d and lack gall to make oppression bitter”-and at the through revealing that doubt of the ghosts validity has weakened his purpose. In the second, Hamlet contemplates how “enterprises of great pitch and moment” (as his resolution to avenge his father) “lose their name of action” by thinking too much about them. To examine the importance of soliloquies in terms of how they contribute to action, it is first necessary to define the nature of this ‘action’. What must be understood is that Hamlet is largely a play about inaction. The plot centres on his persistent irresolution to fulfil his filial and moral duty. In Hamlet’s second soliloquy, he begins “o, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!” He compares his dismal deficiency in passion to an actor, who had ‘tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect’ for a work of fiction. More importantly, it is because of his soliloquies that action eludes him. He is cursed with an excessive meditative faculty- by concentrating too much on whether or not he should act, “the native hue of resolution is sicklied over with the pale cast of thought”. Action characteristically influences further action- it is a never-ending and overlapping sequence of cause and effect. Hence, we should not consider soliloquies as isolated passages- but should broaden the scope of analysis to judge how they act as a catalyst for future events. Hamlet makes a profound decision to use a play to determine the validity of the ghost and “catch the conscience of the king”. This decision leads to a vital turning point, and dictates the plots direction from there on. The third soliloquy follows the second without any section in between where Hamlet interacts with other characters. After indulging in this prolific amount of self-pity and arousing acute melancholy, his abnormally violent reaction to Ophelia’s rejection is not so surprising- especially when he just reflected on the ‘pangs of dipriz’d love.” Plot fluctuations hence are highly dependent on Hamlet’s soliloquies, and therefore play a significant role in the action of the play.

Hamlet’s character is filled out and further clarified through his soliloquies, and hence the interpretation of our hero very much depends on them. These intimate revelations permit the audience to examine and discern Hamlet’s true emotions. On scrutiny by the entire kingdom, it is necessary to constrain or disguise real feeling in the presence of others. One palpable impression that is portrayed via his ‘to be or not to be’ soliloquy is his fixation and yearning for death, and conversely his disgust at the banality of life. Melancholy has completely percolated his character, until existence seems nothing but a ‘mortal coil’- something which ropes him down brutally to humanity in a useless fleshy package. While Hamlet reveals this repugnance earlier during his conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, his already pessimistic attitude has exacerbated since then, so that he teeters near the brink of suicide. A release from the ‘whips’ ‘scorns’ ‘insolence’ and ‘pangs’ annexed to a ‘weary life’ has become something ‘devoutly to be wished’. His sensitivity to the injustice in the world marks his idealistic desire for a moral world. Integrity is especially important to him, and he agonises over which is ‘nobler’; to endure life’s ills with patience, or to ‘take arms’ against them in intrepid defiance. This value also links to his struggle to define ‘truth’. While some regard Hamlet as enigmatic and profound, others interpret Hamlet’s soliloquies as little more than another example of extreme introversion. Indeed, his mind lapses into disconsolate philosophizing whenever he is alone, complaining unremittently. We also realise how prone he is to making sweeping statements, using the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘us’, when his observations on human sociology appertain mainly to himself. This links to the next passage, when he remarks to Ophelia that men are “arrant knaves, all of us”. Furthermore, Hamlet states death is “the undiscovered country /from whose bourn no traveller returns.” Depending on how one interprets this line, it may reveal that Hamlet is prone to indulging in grandiose and melodramatic axioms, without consulting memory first. For his father ‘returns’, at least in spirit, to the mortal realm- he has witnessed the spectre himself. This tendency to give in to his dramatic side links to his rash conflict with Laertes in the graveyard scene. Soliloquies are just as important to play action as other sections because they illustrate crucial character features.

Hamlet’s soliloquies are vital in establishing the mood and themes of the play. Without the soliloquies, Hamlet would remain an entertaining revenge drama. But that enigmatic and sordid quality which suffuses the tragedy would be significantly diminished. The soliloquies, triggered by self-doubt and distress at the corruption of Denmark, explore the dimensions of the human character through Hamlet’s sordid contemplation. The play becomes a dense examination of how external difficulties (the incestuous marriage between Hamlet’s mother and uncle, the ‘unweeded garden’ of the Kingdom, the onus of forced revenge) affect man psychologically. We see the self-directed anger and torment in his second soliloquy- “I,/ a dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak/ like a John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,/ and can say nothing- no, not for a king”. A heart-wrenching hopelessness is also established. Hamlet knows that he has all the motive in the world to kill Claudius- the man murdered his father, married his mother, and usurped his rightful position on the throne. The spectre of his father’s spirit demanded revenge. And yet, he cannot act, and he doesn’t know why. “Fie upon’it! Foh!” he explodes, when he realises that all his ranting on the “remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindles villain” mean nothing in the end, because it achieves nothing. Even through remarking on his procrastination, he is still procrastinating. The third soliloquy is structured similarly to a scholar’s argument; but the subject of this contention is weighty- ‘to be, or not to be’. To live, or to die. He desires the latter, but, a ‘coward’, fearful of ‘what dreams may come’ after death, he resigns himself to life. This theme of death hangs over the entire play; we see Hamlet’s ideas develop on it later during the graveyard scene. Soliloquies affect the mood of the entire play, and are thus part of the action.

Hamlet’s soliloquies constitute a crucial and dramatic part of play dynamics. Often highly intimate, they do not merely reflect on the plays general happenings, but are interwoven into the action. Acting as portals into Hamlet’s psyche, they establish crucial elements of character. Furthermore, they are infinitely important in the interpretation of plot, especially through exploring the theme of Hamlet’s procrastination. The tumultuous state of his mind affects and explains some of his following actions. Additionally, important decisions are made which steer the course of the play. The fact that psychological action is part of the physical action means that the mood of the play becomes more complex. If the audience weren’t privy to the hero’s agonising thoughts, no doubt the play would have only half the reputation it holds today.