

How does Shakespeare use language in Hamlet's 'to be or not to be' soliloquy?

At the very core of Hamlet is an exploration of depression, the limits of man and his emotions, culminating in the idea of suicide. In Hamlet's soliloquy he offers an insight into his troubled yet intelligent, philosophical mind, creating a stark contrast to the narcissistic attitude he displays when in conversation with anyone.

At the start of his soliloquy he utters possibly the most famous phrase in the English language, 'to be or not to be', such a simple question voiced aloud, but the most fundamental question at the heart of our existence. The actual question Hamlet is asking here is whether living is worthwhile, dying is an easier option and Hamlet has previously considered the idea of 'self slaughter', yet people have a preconceived idea of suicide and view it as 'weak'. Many think it to be 'nobler' to suffer the hardships of life, thus is Hamlet's dilemma.

Hamlet's repetitive use of infinitives 'to be, to die, to sleep' show the philosophical side of his soliloquy, his pondering upon these ideas show that nothing is concrete, nothing is certain in life. Throughout the speech Shakespeare invokes vivid imagery and complex metaphors to show Hamlet's deep intellect, 'the undiscovered country, from whose bourn, No traveller returns' these paired with rhetorical questions engage us in a dialect with Hamlet seeing him in a different light and question our ideas.