JSchiff \_ Structural analysis of the Monologue

The soliloquy I am now going to analyse is an extract, which comes from the Act III, scene 1st of the Hamlet, wrote by William Shakespeare around 1600.

During this scene, the reader can understand Hamlet’s feelings through his words, which at first seem to make no sense.

The soliloquy can be analysed by separating the sequences that compose the text, the most relevant ones are the question posed by the character; the options given, to suffer or to take arms against suffering; reflection on death’s meaning; considerations about sleep; a mourn about life’s suffering and a question about why people bears suffering.

In the first section Hamlet asks himself (and indirectly asks to the readers, too) the famous question: to be or not to be. In this line, the poet wants the reader to wonder the reason of this question and its’ possible meanings. An intelligent reader should ask themselves what the character is referring to. Although, it is a rhetorical question, which does not need any answer, because it will be explained later.

The second section is the one that goes from line 2 to line 5, in this paragraph Hamlet proposes to options to answer the previous question: suffering and bearing life’s sufferance or dying trying to oppose them. The function of this section is to propose the reader to think about the options given, too: William Shakespeare might have wanted people to wonder about the answer to this question, since we all must face it, soon or later in life.

In the lines from the 5th to the 9th, the poet compares death to sleeping, since they both bring serenity and take away life’s pains, making death appear noble and desirable. The poet is here trying to reassure the readers about death’s meaning and consequences (William Shakespeare lived in the 17th century, at the time the concept of death and afterlife were still strongly related to religion and wrapped in doubt and mystery).

In the following sequence Shakespeare wonders how could you dream, if death is like sleeping: this is a clear reference to afterlife, the main fear of human beings since the origin of the specie.

In the fifth sequence, the poet makes a short list of examples of common pains in life, and, in the following sequence wonders why a man would bear all this suffering for. It is not only the character who must answer to this question, but the readers too since that is the intent of William Shakespeare’s writing.