

Hamlet's delay

Hamlet is famous because he delays: he has become a byword for indecision and doubt. Every interpretation of Hamlet's character tries to explain why he delays. Which of the following interpretations/suggestions convinces you the most?

1. Early audiences may well have seen Hamlet as a traditionally impulsive and violent revenger, delayed only by difficult circumstances.
2. The Romantics saw Hamlet as a dreamer who prefers meditation to action, and cannot resolve a practical problem without metaphysical speculation of the most intricate kind. According to Goethe, he is a "lovely, pure and moral nature, without the strength of nerve which forms a hero".
3. He is a man debilitated by melancholy, whose thinking is really "an unconscious weaving of pretexts for inaction" (Bradley, 1904)
4. He is the victim of an Oedipus complex, more horrified by his mother's remarriage than by his uncle's crime.
5. Hamlet is deeply concerned for his own honour, and will not take revenge until he is sure that people will understand his true motives.
6. He is a man of exceptionally marked self-consciousness, who plays a series of roles, but sees all of them as false. So he cannot take seriously the vindictive fury of the traditional revenger.
7. He suspects that he is being deceived by an evil spirit in the form of his father.

Hamlet always analyses his feelings before he allows himself to act on them. Is this an admirable quality or a defect? Do you do the same?