

Hamlet Soliloquy Study

In preparation for poetry analysis on the AP Exam, you will be analyzing the soliloquies in *Hamlet* for this unit. There are four soliloquies in this play.

A *soliloquy* is a unique form of speech in a play. It is defined as “A dramatic or literary form of discourse in which a character talks to himself or herself revealing his or her thoughts without addressing a listener.”

In these four speeches, Hamlet reveals his innermost desires and fears. It is the closest the reader will get to viewing Hamlet’s thoughts. Consider our ongoing discussion about Hamlet’s character, particularly his feigned or real madness when you study his soliloquies.

- 1.2 – “O that this too too solid flesh would melt”
- 2.2 – “O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!”
- 3.1 – “To be or not to be, that is the question”
- 4.4 – “How all occasions do inform against me”



The task:

For each soliloquy, you must do three things:

- 1) Be able to define every word used in the soliloquy
- 2) Write a paraphrase of the speech (*not* a summary)
- 3) Produce comments & questions

After you have done this, write down any questions or insightful comments that come to mind. Consider characterization, relationships with other scenes and/or speeches in the play, relevance to themes, etc. It is your job to ask about anything that you find unclear or confusing.

Some notes on the task:

- A paraphrase is not a summary; it is a re-phrasing of the original in language that makes sense to you.
- Shakespeare writes in complete sentences; so should you.
- Hamlet is speaking, so your paraphrase should be in first person (Hamlet’s voice), not “He says that...”.



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