

How does the use of diction, imagery, and metaphor in this soliloquy reveal Hamlet's state of mind?

1. On your first reading, draw a horizontal line at each shift in idea, subject, or feeling.
2. Then, in the margins, write very brief notes to label each section.
3. Read back over each section to find and underline at least one key word or phrase in each section that expresses feeling or attitude.
 → This is where you notice Shakespeare's use of diction, imagery, metaphor, and other techniques that help reveal the larger **tone** of the soliloquy.
4. Now look back over the entire movement of the soliloquy, and determine the progression of the feelings, ideas, and attitudes it expresses.
 → This progression or pattern reveals the larger **tone** and **theme** of the piece.

O, that this too too sullied flesh would melt,133
 Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,
 Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
 His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God, God,
 How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
 Seem to me all the uses of this world!
 Fie on't, ah fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden
 That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature
 Possess it merely. That it should come to this:
 But two months dead—nay, not so much, not two.
 So excellent a king, that was to this
 Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother
 That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
 Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,
 Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him,
 As if increase of appetite had grown
 By what it fed on. And yet, within a month
 (Let me not think on't; frailty, thy name is woman!),
 A little month, or ere those shoes were old
 With which she followed my poor father's body,
 Like Niobe, all tears—why she, even she
 (O God, a beast, that wants discourse of reason,
 Would have mourned longer!), married with my uncle,
 My father's brother, but no more like my father
 Than I to Hercules. Within a month,
 Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
 Had left the flushing in her gallèd eyes,
 She married. O, most wicked speed, to post
 With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
 It is not, nor it cannot come to good.
 But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.164

Also, notice the syntax (or sentence structure) of this soliloquy—in particular, the way Hamlet's thoughts are frequently interrupted by dashes.

How does Shakespeare's use of syntax help us understand Hamlet's state of mind?

POLONIUS'S SPEECH TO LAERTES

POLONIUS

Yet here, Laertes? Aboard, aboard, for shame! 60
The wind sits in the shoulder of your sail,
And you are stayed for. There, my blessing with thee.
And these few precepts in thy memory
Look thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue, 65
Nor any unproportioned thought his act.
Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.
Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel,
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment 70
Of each new-hatched, unfledged courage. Beware
Of entrance to a quarrel, but, being in,
Bear't that th' opposèd may beware of thee.
Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice.
Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment. 75
Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
But not expressed in fancy (rich, not gaudy),
For the apparel oft proclaims the man,
And they in France of the best rank and station
<Are> of a most select and generous chief in that. 80
Neither a borrower nor a lender <be,>
For <loan> oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing <dulls the> edge of husbandry.
This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day, 85
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
Farewell. My blessing season this in thee.