

"To be, or not to be,  
that is the question . . ."

Act I, scene ii

NOTES

1 Hamlet has returned home from studying in Wittenberg to attend his father's funeral. Still in deep mourning, Hamlet is appalled by his mother's hasty remarriage to the dead King's brother, who has assumed the throne and persists in calling him "son." The circumstances drive Hamlet to voice his first passionate soliloquy.

From Act I, Scene II:

Hamlet: son to the late King Hamlet, and nephew to the present King  
Claudius: King of Denmark

Gertrude: Queen of Denmark, and mother to Hamlet

Polonius: Lord Chamberlain

Laertes: son to Polonius

Location: Elsinore, the castle

- 2 KING: Take thy fair hour, Laertes, time be thine,  
3 And thy best graces spend it at thy will!  
4 But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son—  
5 HAMLET: [Aside] A little more than kin, and less than kind.  
6 KING: How is it that the clouds still hang on you?  
7 HAMLET: Not so, my lord, I am too much in the sun.  
8 QUEEN: Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted color off,  
9 And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.  
10 Do not for ever with thy vailed lids  
11 Seek for thy noble father in the dust:  
12 Thou know'st 'tis common, all that lives must die,  
13 Passing through nature to eternity.  
14 HAMLET: Ay, madam, it is common.

#### SAMPLE ANNOTATION

#### Literary Elements

The point of view allows the reader to hear a cleverly written aside that effectively establishes conflict and Hamlet's disgust for his uncle. The references to weather create a brooding mood that successfully mirrors Hamlet's sense of frustration. These elements make me think something tragic will happen.

What does this mean?  
Get over it!





15 QUEEN: If it be,  
16 Why seems it so particular with thee?

17 HAMLET: Seems, madam? Nay, it is, I know not "seems."  
18 'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,  
19 Nor customary suits of solemn black,  
20 Nor windy suspiration of forc'd breath,  
21 No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,  
22 Nor the dejected havior of the visage,  
23 Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,  
24 That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,  
25 For they are actions that a man might play,  
26 But I have that within which passes show,  
27 These but the **trappings** and the suits of woe.



*family*

28 KING: 'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,  
29 To give these mourning duties to your father.  
30 But you must know your father lost a father,  
31 That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound  
32 In **filial** obligation for some term  
33 To do obsequious sorrow. But to persever  
34 In obstinate condolement is a course  
35 Of impious **stubbornness**, 'tis **unmanly grief**,  
36 It shows a will most **incorrect to heaven**,  
37 A heart unfortified, or mind impatient,  
38 An understanding **simple and unschool'd**:  
39 For what we know must be, and is as common  
40 As any the most **vulgar** thing to sense,  
41 Why should we in our **peevish** opposition  
42 Take it to heart? Fie, 'tis a **fault to heaven**,  
43 A **fault against the dead**, a **fault to nature**,  
44 To reason most absurd, whose common theme  
45 Is death of fathers, and who still hath cried,  
46 From the first corse till he that died to-day,  
47 "This must be so." We pray you, throw to earth  
48 This **unprevailing woe**, and think of us  
49 As of a father, for let the world take note  
50 You are the most immediate to our throne,  
51 And with no less nobility of love  
52 Than that which dearest father bears his son  
53 Do I impart toward you. For your intent  
54 In going back to school in Wittenberg,  
55 It is most **retrograde** to our desire,  
56 And we beseech you, bend you to remain

*who's your  
Daddy?*



57 Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye,  
58 Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.

59 QUEEN: Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet,  
60 I pray thee stay with us; go not to Wittenberg.

61 HAMLET: I shall in all my best obey you, madam.

62 KING: Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply.  
63 Be as ourself in Denmark. Madam, come.  
64 This gentle and unforc'd accord of Hamlet  
65 Sits smiling to my heart, in grace whereof,  
66 No jocund health that Denmark drinks to-day,  
67 But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell,  
68 And the King's rouse the heaven shall bruit again,  
69 Respeaking earthly thunder. Come away.

70 [Flourish. Exeunt all but HAMLET.]

71 HAMLET: O that this too too solid flesh would melt,  
72 Thaw and resolve itself into a dew  
73 Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd  
74 His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God, God,  
75 How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable  
76 Seem to me all the uses of this world!  
77 Fie on't, ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden  
78 That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature  
79 Possess it merely. That it should come to this!  
80 But two months dead, nay, not so much, not two.  
81 So excellent a king, that was to this  
82 Hyperion!—to a satyr? so loving to my mother  
83 That he might not beteem the winds of heaven  
84 Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth,  
85 Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him  
86 As if increase of appetite had grown  
87 By what it fed on, and yet, within a month  
88 Let me not think on't! Frailty, thy name is woman!  
89 A little month, or ere those shoes were old  
90 With which she followed my poor father's body;  
91 Like Niobe, all tears—why, she, even she—  
92 O, God, a beast that wants discourse of reason

Why?  
Keep your friends close, and  
keep your enemies closer

Stay  
Gilean

What does  
Hamlet  
want to  
become?  
a dew drop =  
disappear

Pom =  
mother

What does  
this  
mean?

## SAMPLE ANNOTATION

### Literary Elements

Alone on stage, Hamlet wishes he could metaphorically dissolve into dew because he thinks his life has lost all meaning. The author's specific diction choices, "weary, stale, flat and unprofitable" effectively convey the disgust Hamlet feels about the marriage of his uncle and his mother.

1. **Hyperion**: the sun-god

2. **satyr**: In Greek mythology, a lustful, drunken god of the woods, represented as a half man-half horse or goat.

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analogy

- 93 Would have mourn'd longer—married<sup>3</sup> with my uncle,  
 94 My father's brother, but no more like my father  
 95 Than I to Hercules. Within a month,  
 96 Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears  
 97 Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,  
 98 She married—O most wicked speed: to post  
 99 With such dexterity to incestuous sheets,  
 100 It is not, nor it cannot come to good,  
 101 But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

From Act II, Scene ii:

- 102 *Hamlet has been visited by an apparition claiming to be the ghost of his father, who urges Hamlet to avenge his father's murder. Hamlet swears he will obey, but hesitates. Watching a group of traveling players perform the murder of Priam, king of Troy, Hamlet compares one actor's passionate portrayal of Hecuba, Priam's grieving widow, to his own inaction.*

- 103 HAMLET: O, what a rogue and  
 peasant slave am I!  
 104 Is it not monstrous that this player  
 here,  
 105 But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,  
 106 Could force his soul so to his own  
 conceit  
 107 That from her working all his visage  
 wann'd,  
 108 Tears in his eyes, distraction in his  
 aspect,  
 109 A broken voice, an' his whole function sultry  
 110 With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing,  
 111 For Hecuba!  
 112 What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,  
 113 That he should weep for her? What would he do  
 114 Had he the motive and the cue for passion  
 115 That I have? He would drown the stage with tears,  
 116 And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,  
 117 Make mad the guilty, and appall the free,  
 118 Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed  
 119 The very faculties of eyes and ears. Yet I,  
 120 A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak<sup>3</sup>  
 121 Like John-a-dreams<sup>4</sup>, unpregnant of<sup>5</sup> my cause,



Hamlet, Horatio, Marcellus and the Ghost,  
 engraving by Robert Thew, based on a  
 painting by Henry Fuseli.

3. peak to mope

4. John-a-dreams a nickname for a daydreamer

5. unpregnant of unquicken, or unmoved, by

