

- Ham.* To be, or not to be, that is the question:
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
 (5) And by opposing, end them. To die, to sleep –
 No more, and by a sleep to say we end
 The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
 That flesh is heir to; 'tis a consummation
 Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep –
 (10) To sleep, perchance to dream – ay, there's the rub;
 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
 Must give us pause; there's the respect
 That makes calamity of so long life:
 (15) For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
 Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely¹,
 The pangs of despis'd love, the law's delay,
 The insolence of office, and the spurns
 That patient merit of th' unworthy takes,
 (20) When he himself might his quietus² make
 With a bare bodkin³; who would fardels⁴ bear,
 To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
 But that the dread of something after death,
 The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn
 (25) No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have
 Than fly to others that we know not of?
 Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
 And thus the native hue of resolution
 (30) Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
 And enterprises of great pitch and moment
 With this regard their currents turn awry,
 And lose the name of action. – Soft you now,
 The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons⁵
 (35) Be all my sins rememb' red.

¹ contumely - rudeness or contempt arising from arrogance; insolence

² quietus - something that serves to suppress, check, or eliminate; release from life; death

³ bodkin - a small, sharply pointed instrument

⁴ fardel - a bundle

⁵ orisons - prayers

Sample outline for an essay on Hamlet's "to be or not to be" soliloquy

Introduction: In this soliloquy from act 3, Hamlet is trying to determine which would be better: to deal with his mother's marriage silently or to oppose it? He contemplates suicide but dreads what is after death. It is better to live and know what will happen than die and face unknown. Shakespeare conveys Hamlet's conflicted state of mind through diction, imagery, and syntax.

II. internal conflict shown through diction

1. internal conflict in general: "suffer" (line 2), "troubles" (4), "heart-ache" and "shocks" (7), "calamity" (14), "bare bodkin" (21), "dread" (23), "sicklied" and "pale" (30), "sins" (35)
2. Hamlet feels condemned: "end," "die," "sleep" (line 5); "whips and scorns" (15); "mortal coil" (12); "grunt," "swear," and "weary" (22)
 - a. In a lose-lose situation: "sea of troubles," "heartache," calamity vs. dread; undiscover'd country, no traveller returns
3. thinking/consciousness: makes us "cowards" (28), having a "pale cast" (30), "sicklied" (effect on resolution - the ability to decide things), turning enterprises "awry" (32)

III. diction used to life and death (Hamlet's two choices)

1. death (positively viewed): "sleep" (also syntactical - esp. through parallelism/repetition), "shuffling" of life, a quittance ("quietus")
2. life (negatively viewed): turmoil ("mortal coil"), outrageous fortune (oxymoron? sarcasm?), heartache, thousand shocks, calamity, weary, burdens ("fardels"), painful/punishment

IV. imagery - negative

1. "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," "whips and scorns of time" - time abuses Hamlet
2. "sea of troubles" - his troubles never end; off into horizon
3. "grunt and sweat under weary life" - life is too difficult

4. "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought" - thoughts can make you mad; pale as death? (i.e. desirous of death)

V. syntax

1. Long sentences - overwhelmed by thoughts; stream of consciousness; contemplative; slows pace?
2. Parallelism - "to die, to sleep" twice right after question at beginning - he just wants peace, to escape - compares life to pain, death, and peace
3. Pauses - he is so bombarded with thoughts he gets overwhelmed and can't continue
4. Inverted sentences (ln 24-25, 34-35) - suggests his disorientation, so anxious he can't form a coherent thought
5. *Lists* of things wrong with life (lists and lists - not just one thing)