

PRINCE HAL'S SOLILOQUY

The Prince's speech (1.2.188–210) is divided into six distinct sections:

- 1) **Introduction:** An unrhymed couplet in which the prince announces that he will consort with his friends only for a time.

PRINCE I know you all, and will a while uphold
The unyoked humour of your idleness.

- 2) **Sun and Clouds:** A seven-line section in which the prince compares himself to the sun — a traditional image of royalty — and his companions to obscuring clouds.

Yet herein will I imitate the sun,
Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
To smother up his beauty from the world,
That when he please again to be himself,
Being wanted he may be more wondered at
By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
Of vapours that did seem to strangle him.

- 3) **Holiday and Everyday:** A four-line section in which the prince invokes an opposition between holiday and everyday.

If all the year were playing holidays,
To sport would be as tedious as to work;
But when they seldom come, they wished-for come,
And nothing pleaseth but rare accidents.

- 4) **Debt and Payment:** A four-line section in which the prince represents his promised reformation as paying an unpromised debt.

So when this loose behaviour I throw off
And pay the debt I never promised,
By how much better than my word I am,
By so much shall I falsify men's hopes;

- 5) **Glittering Metal:** A four-line section in which the prince compares his promised reformation to bright metal glittering against a dull — “sullen” — background.

And like bright metal on a sullen ground,
My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,
Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
Than that which hath no foil to set it off.

- 6) Conclusion: A rhymed couplet which summarizes the argument and signals, as rhymed couplets often do in Shakespeare, the conclusion both of the speech and of the scene.

I'll so offend to make offence a skill,
Redeeming time when men think least I will.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does the notion of time in the prince's soliloquy relate to the concerns of the tavern scene which it concludes? Observe that the scene begins with the prince's elaborate joking response to Falstaff's question, "Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?" How does time figure in the play as a whole? Investigate by searching the text for the term *time*.
2. The prince speaks of his promised reformation as paying an unpromised debt. How is the notion of debt related to the concerns of the play as a whole? Note that toward the close of Act 2, Scene 4, Peto reads aloud from Falstaff's tavern reckoning (2.4.518–22). Investigate this motif by searching the text for the terms *debt* and *reckoning*.
3. The latter part of the soliloquy (sections 3-7) consists of three unrhymed quatrains and a rhymed couplet. Except that the quatrains are unrhymed, the scheme of this part of the soliloquy is that of a Shakespearean sonnet. Compare this to Sonnet 55. How does Shakespeare's practice in the sonnet form contribute to his ability to convey the illusion of a mind thinking?

Sonnet 55

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme,
But you shall shine more bright in these contents
Than unswept stone besmeared with **sluttish** time.
When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
And **broils** root out the work of masonry,
Nor Mars **his** sword nor war's quick fire shall burn
The living record of your memory.
'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity
Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room
Even in the eyes of all posterity
That wear this world out to the **ending doom**.
So, till the judgment that yourself arise,
You live in this, and dwell in lover's eyes.