

Soliloquy

Definition of Soliloquy

A soliloquy is a popular literary device often used in [drama](#) to reveal the innermost thoughts of a [character](#). It is a great technique used to convey the progress of action of the play, by means of expressing a character's thoughts about a certain character or past, present, or upcoming event, while talking to himself without acknowledging the presence of any other person.

The word *soliloquy* is derived from the Latin word *solo*, which means “to himself,” and *loquor*, which means “I speak,” respectively. A soliloquy is often used as a means of character revelation or character manifestation to the reader or the [audience](#) of the play.

Due to a lack of time and space, it was sometimes considered essential to present information about the plot, and to expose the feelings and intentions of the characters. Historically, dramatists made extensive use of soliloquies in their plays, but it has become outdated, though some playwrights still use it in their plays. Soliloquy examples abound during the Elizabethan era.

Soliloquy and Monologue

Sometimes soliloquy is wrongly mixed up with [monologue](#) and [aside](#). These two techniques are distinctly different from a soliloquy. Although, like soliloquy, a monologue is a speech, the purpose and presentation of both is different. In a monologue, a character usually makes a speech in the presence of other characters, while in a soliloquy, the character or [speaker](#) speaks to himself. By doing so, the character keeps these thoughts secret from the other characters of the play. An aside on the other hand, is a short comment by a character towards the audience, often for another character, but usually without his knowledge.

Examples of Soliloquy in Literature

Shakespeare made extensive use of soliloquies in his plays. But before Shakespeare, we find considerable use of this significant dramatic technique in Christopher Marlow's play *Doctor Faustus*. Modern plays do not have as many examples of soliloquy as the Renaissance era.

Example #1: *Doctor Faustus* (By Christopher Marlow)

“Yet art thou still but Faustus, and a man”

In the first soliloquy of *Doctor Faustus*, Marlow has nicely summed up Faustus' life, motives, intentions, and growth of his ideas that took place before the start of the action. The extraordinarily ambitious soul of Doctor Faustus is revealed here, who was not satisfied with the existing branches of knowledge, and needed something beyond the powers of man.

Example #2: *Doctor Faustus* (By Christopher Marlow)

“Fair Nature's eye, rise, rise again, and make
Perpetual day; or let this hour be but
A year, a month, a week, a natural day,
That Faustus may repent and save his soul!”

These lines are taken from Dr. Faustus' last soliloquy, where Faustus makes an appeal in the last hour's anguish to stop whatever was done.

Example #3: *Hamlet* (By William Shakespeare)

“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...”

Hamlet is in a state of mind that only Shakespeare can describe through his magnificent pen. Uncertain, reluctant Prince Hamlet was literally unable to do anything but merely wait to “catch the conscience of the king” to complete his supposed plan.

Example #4: *Romeo and Juliet* (By William Shakespeare)

“O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I’ll no longer be a Capulet.”

Juliet was thinking aloud about the traditional enmity between Romeo’s clan and her family, expressing her hopelessness about the success of their love.

Example #5: *The Crucible* (By Arthur Miller)

“Peace. It is providence, and no great change; we are only what we always were, but naked now. Aye, naked! And the wind, God’s icy wind, will blow!”

Although modern plays hardly use any soliloquies, *The Crucible* has some used in the second act. This short form of soliloquy comes at the end of Act 2, where John Proctor faces the open sky when talking to Mary Warren.

Function of Soliloquy

A soliloquy in a play is a great dramatic technique or tool that intends to reveal the inner workings of the character. No other technique can perform the function of supplying essential progress of the action of the story better than a soliloquy. It is used, not only to convey the development of the play to the audience, but also to provide an opportunity to see inside the mind of a certain character.

Wherefore Art Thou Romeo
Frailty, Thy Name is Woman