



Drama

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What is Drama?

Drama is a kind of fictional representation through dialogue and performance. It is a literary genre which imitates some action. Drama is also a type of a play written for theater, television, radio, and film. Drama is a composition in prose or verse adapted to be acted and represented with gestures, costumes and scenery, as in real life. It portrays life of characters and tells a story usually involving conflicts and emotions through action and dialogue, designed for a theater.

History of Drama

- 1. Greek Period** Ancient Greeks (500 B.C) created drama. They divided drama into two types: tragedy and comedy. The best known Ancient Greek playwrights were **Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes**. Greek plays were performed outdoors in amphi-theatres. The Greeks used stage devices like trap doors, chorus and masks.
- 2. Middle Ages (7th to 15th century).** In the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church used drama to tell stories from the Bible. There were Mystery Plays (Bible stories), Miracle plays (stories of saints) and Morality plays (stories of morals and good conduct)

- 3. Elizabethan drama (16th century)** During Elizabethan period, drama started in theatres. William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe were major dramatists. Women were not allowed to perform, so male played female roles.
- 4. Restoration Drama (17-18th Century)** Restoration drama got its name from the restoration of Charles II, when the theatres reopened. The drama reflected weaknesses of Court morals through satire, farce, and comedy. **Comedy of Manners** was the genre that became popular during this period. John Dryden and William Congreve were major dramatists of this period
- 5. Victorian Theatre (19th Century)** Theatre in the Victorian era (ruled by Queen Victoria from 1837 to 1901) presented dramas related to social problems. Theatres were opened for factory workers who came to cities. Themes included problems of the working class, labor class, women and children problems , and their education. George Bernard Shaw John M Synge and Oscar Wilde were major dramatists of this period
- 6. Drama from the 1900s (modern)** After World War II, three new style of drama developed: Theatre of Absurd, Angry young man Theatre, and Existential drama.

- "Theatre of the Absurd." style depicted horrors of war. Important playwrights of this style were Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, and Harold Pinter.

- The Angry Young Men style presented problems of the working class or of lower middle-class. These plays were an attack

on the British class system.

- Existential drama. This type of drama was philosophical and spiritual. Existential plays made people think about questions like "what is life?" "What do humans exist for?" "what is freedom of mind and soul?" These plays filled man with sad emotions such as worry, fear, and thoughts about death.

Tragedy and Comedy

Tragedy:

- Definition: A tragedy is defined as a story with a sad and depressing ending.

Tragedy is a serious drama in which a central character, the protagonist meets with disaster either through some personal fault or through unavoidable circumstances

- Features: (i) a tragedy has the ability to evoke pity and fear in the audience (ii) the protagonist is noble and powerful. (iii) Action in tragedy goes from good to bad.

- Genres: Greek tragedy, revenge tragedy, domestic tragedy, Bourgeois tragedy, Shakespearean tragedy

- Greek Tragedy: Greek Tragedy is best seen in ancient Greek writers Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. The Athenian tragedy is the oldest surviving form of Greek tragedy. It was performed in late March/early April at an annual state religious festival in honor of Dionysus god of wine and fertility.

- Examples: Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet and Othello (Shakespeare). Christopher Marlowe also wrote tragedies: The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus, Tamburlaine. John Webster (1580-1635), wrote the famous

tragedies: The Duchess of Malfi, The White Devil. Modern Tragedies include Death of a salesman by Arthur Miller and Murder in the Cathedra by T.S.Eliot.

Comedy:

- Definition: Comedy is defined as a literary work written to amuse or entertain a reader. Comedy is a humorous work generally intended to amuse by creating laughter, fun and pleasure.
- Features: (i) A comedy has comedic situations with positive outcomes. (ii) Its aim was to underscore human follies and foolishness in a humorous manner.
- Genres: Farce, Melodrama and Musical Drama
- Greek comedy: The Greeks used the word comedy for stage-plays with happy endings.
- Shakespearean Comedy William Shakespeare used comedy for light-hearted drama with happy ending.

Shakespeare's comedies used humorous language and comic devices.

- Examples Shakespearean comedies: All's Well That Ends Well; As You Like It; The Comedy of Errors; Love's Labour's Lost; The Merchant of Venice; A Midsummer Night's Dream Modern comedies include: Slaughterhouse Five

(Kurt Vonnegut); *The House of Mirth* (Edith Wharton) *Pride and Prejudice* (Jane Austen).

Difference between Tragedy and Comedy

C o m e d y	T r a g e d y
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characters are ordinary, common people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characters tend to be royals, superhuman, semi-divine etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protagonist is an ordinary person, but shows a willingness to learn and change. Protagonist is called a comic hero. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protagonist is a member of royalty, a nobleman or a divine being and shows reluctance to change. Protagonist of a tragedy is called a tragic hero.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comedy has a light, happy tone and it emphasizes human shortcomings (weaknesses) which cause suffering. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tragedy has a solemn and serious tone and it also emphasizes on human weaknesses and make suggestions for improvements.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict in a comedy is often not serious. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict in a tragedy is often very serious.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comedy uses ambiguous language, resulting in humor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tragedy uses more concrete and formal language.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comedy views life as ridiculous and people behave in a humorous way. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tragedy views life as a misfortune and it is filled with pain and suffering and always inevitably ends in death, loss etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comedy has a happy, amusing, light ending. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tragedy has a mournful ending.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Types (Genres) : • <u>Farce</u> – it is a nonsensical genre of drama, which often overacts or engages in nonsense humor • <u>Melodrama</u> – it is exaggerated drama, sometimes sensational • <u>Musical Drama</u> – it is presented through acting and dialogue, through dance and music in a comic way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Types (Genres) : • <u>Revenge tragedy</u>, a drama in which motive is revenge; a common form of English tragedy in the Elizabethan era. • <u>Domestic tragedy</u>, a drama in which the tragic protagonists are ordinary middle-class or lower-class individuals • <u>Classical / Neoclassical tragedy</u>, a drama in which protagonists are kingly or aristocratic and their downfall is an affair of the state
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Major Elements of Drama

- **Characters:** characters are the people in the play. Most plays have a round, major characters and flat, minor characters. Generally, there are two main characters:
 - **Protagonist:** The main character, usually the one who sets the action in motion. Example: Hamlet is the protagonist in the play ‘Hamlet’.
 - **Antagonist:** The character that stands as rival to the protagonist is called the antagonist. He is the villain. Example: Claudius
- **Diction** Diction is the words uttered by characters in a play. Diction is the best medium of language or expression through which the characters reveal their thoughts and feelings.
- **Plot** The plot refers to the series (sequence) of actions/ events or the structural framework in a play. The plot means ‘the arrangement of the incidents’. Normally the plot is divided into five acts, and each Act is further divided into several scenes. Plot gives meaning and cohesion to the events. There are three important parts of a plot
 1. The beginning is called The Rising Action or Exposition.
 2. The end is called The Falling Action or Resolution

3. The turning point of the plot is called the climax

- **Setting:** The setting identifies the time and place in which the events occur. It tells us where the story happened and the time it occurred.
- **Stage directions:** Stage directions may also include the characters' body language, facial expressions, and even the tone of voice. Comments or remarks about the surroundings and when a character enters or exits are also made in stage directions. Thus stage directions help us understand the feelings of the character and the mood of the story.
- **Themes:** Theme refers to dramatized idea of the play. The theme actually tells what the play means. Rather stating what happens in the story, General themes of a play are: (1) Conflict--between two individuals (2) Conflict between man and a supernatural power (3) Conflict between the man and himself
- **Dramatic tension:** The most basic element of drama used to stir the emotions of the audience.

Origin and Development of Drama (From Early Greek Period to Elizabethan period)

Different Period of Drama:

1. Ancient Greek Drama
2. Roman Drama
3. Medieval Drama
4. Renaissance Drama
5. Elizabethan Drama

1. Ancient Greek Drama: (550 BC)

- The ancient Greek drama did not show violence and death on the stage. There is a frequent use of messengers to relate information. Stories are based on myths or history with different interpretations. The playwright shows unity of time space and action. The focus is on psychological and ethical attributes of characters rather than physical and sociological. The Chorus provides background.
- The biggest contribution of Greek drama is the Tragic Hero. The tragic hero was the main character in Greek tragedy. He would make an error in his action that leads to his tragic downfall. Some common characteristics of a tragic hero were : (1) The hero discovers that he is a result of his own actions, not by events happening around him. (2) The hero can see and understand his doom (3) A tragic hero is often of noble birth, a king or a prince (4) he is faced with a serious decision.
- According to Aristotle, a tragic hero was a good and great man; he has a tragic flaw; this tragic flaw is psychological and leads to his downfall; he evokes catharsis in the audience.

2. Roman Drama: 240 BC- 5^h Century AD

- The earliest Roman drama evolved from carnivals and village entertainment and rites performed on religious occasions. The Roman drama was influenced greatly by the Greek plays. Most Roman tragedies were adaptations of Greek originals. However, the Roman plays did not have the Chorus and was replaced by an interlude music during scene changes. The use of rhetoric grew in Roma plays as seen in long speeches. The Romans also did not wear masks and used women as actors. The violence scenes were also shown on the stage. The Roman plays were less religious and often made fun of Christianity.

3. Medieval Drama:(6th - 14th Century)

- The fall of the Rome in 6th century, marked a period known as the “**Dark Age**” it is called the Dark Age because of illiteracy, lack of knowledge and poverty of that time. There was also much political turmoil and instability. The church was the only stable government. The church was corrupt and used religion for political reasons
- The Medieval drama started after the fall of the Roman drama in the 6th century. The major contribution of medieval drama is the use of the vernacular (every day Language), thus providing opportunities for larger audiences to participate. Earlier, only the rich and educated could understand plays because the plays used Greek and Latin languages which the common people did not understand.
- The medieval drama faced a great opposition of the church. The church was against any form of art including theater, however this changed later on. For this reason, there is not much record of plays of this period. Moreover, people were also illiterate and poor. They could not even read or write; therefore it was hard to actually write any plays or art pieces for the theater.
- The major features of Medieval drama are :

- **Religious drama:** or Christian plays. Example are mystery plays and Miracle plays about lives of saints, Morality plays about common man's struggle between Good and Evil.
- **Farces:** a comedy that aimed at entertaining the audience through exaggerated situations People

from lower class usually liked this type of plays

- **Masques:** was a form of festive courtly entertainment. The actors would wear masks and dance around. This type of plays were preferred by high class people.
- Medieval drama declined after the birth of the protestants in England and their fight with the Roman Catholic Church. It started with renewed interest in religious plays. There was also a revival of old Roman and Greek Culture, which is called Renaissance

4. **Renaissance Drama: (15th Century)**

- Renaissance was an intellectual movement, which first started in Italy in the 14th century and gradually spread all over Europe. It marked a transition from the medieval to the modern world. Actors and playwrights no longer had to follow the directions of the church for stage and plays. More creative storytelling and staging options were now available. Production now had a more professional quality and spread to a wider audience.
- **Renaissance** means rebirth or revival; it was revival of literature and arts. It was a rediscovery of ancient Roman and Greek culture. There were also new discovery in geography and astrology. There was the religious reformation and the economic expansion due to new discoveries and trade between countries. Renaissance was a historical period in which the European humanist thinkers and scholars made attempts to get rid of old feudalistic ideas, and introduced new ideas that expressed the interests of the rising labor class .
- **Two features of Renaissance**

1. There was a thirsting curiosity for the classical literature, for the study of Greek and Latin authors.
2. Second, there was the interest in the Activities of humanity. People stopped looking upon the Church or religion; they started thinking about themselves and the human problems. There were thinkers, artists and poets who talked about man's life and human achievements.

(5) English Renaissance and Elizabethan Period (1500 -1660)

The Important features of English renaissance are:

1. This period was full of great changes. A London-centred culture that was both courtly and popular produced great poetry and drama.
2. It was a period of growth of drama and arts. The most famous playwright William Shakespeare belonged to this period. Other important playwrights of this period include Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, and John Webster.
3. The translation of the Bible into the English language was carried out by the Protestants. The first complete English Bible was translated by John Wycliffe in the 14th century. William Tyndal (1490-1536), a Protestant and martyr of the Reformation, worked on another English version. He translated the New Testament and portions of the Old Testament. In 1611 under James I the authorized version of Bible was translated and was sometimes called the King James Bible.

English Renaissance Drama

Short Introduction of English Renaissance drama

- English Renaissance drama is sometimes called Elizabethan drama. Elizabeth I was Queen of England from 1558 to 1603. But the drama continued even after Elizabeth's death, during the rule of King James I (1603–1625, Jacobean period) and his son King Charles I (1625–1649, Caroline). Therefore, the drama in this period is sometimes called the Jacobean drama or Caroline drama. Shakespeare started writing plays during Elizabeth's reign, but continued into the reign of James.

Features of English Renaissance drama:

1. In addition to tragedy and comedy, there were also history plays on earlier English kings e.g., Shakespeare's *Henry IV* and *Richard III* and Marlowe's *Edward II* are best examples of English history plays. Poetry plays were also written. These plays were both in rhymed verse and blank verse.
2. Elizabethan plays were influenced by mystery plays and morality plays.
3. During the later part, there was a change. Drama was used to show people's own life and day-to-day interests and problems.

New Types of Plays:

- During the Elizabethan period, new types of drama emerged such as
 - 1. Revenge Plays** – it was a dramatic genre in which the protagonist seeks revenge for an imagined or actual injury. Generally, the ghost of the murdered victim urges revenge (e.g Shakespear's *Hamlet* and Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*)
 - 2. Historical Plays** - These historical plays were informative for those who had not or were unable to read about the history of England. Important historical plays were *Richard III* and *Henry V*, (by William Shakespeare), *Edward II* (by Marlowe) and *Edward King* (by George Peele).
 - 3. Tragicomedy** It was a mixture of tragedy and comedy. It represented a serious action a tragic disaster to the protagonist, but a happy ending at the end. Examples Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.

Meet the Playwright



William Shakespeare is a mystery. He never went to college, only the local grammar school, but ended up writing the most famous plays in the history of the world. How did it happen? Nobody really knows.

We know very little about Shakespeare's personal life, his childhood and his marriage when you think about the impact he's had on our world. We have none of Shakespeare's letters, diaries, or original manuscripts. All we have is his signature on a couple of legal documents. In fact, the lack of information on him has made a lot of people argue that he never really wrote all those plays or even existed at all!

Never forget, Shakespeare wrote his plays to be PERFORMED not read. Never sit down to READ one of his plays if you don't know it. Get up and try ACTING IT OUT. You'll be surprised how much you'll understand. Reading Shakespeare is ALWAYS hard, Performing him is EASY.

Will wrote over 40 plays, but only 37 have survived. He wrote every kind of story you can think of- tragedies, comedies, histories. 22 of his plays were about WAR. Guess he had human nature down... In his plays you can find teenagers fighting with their parents, teenagers running away, teenagers falling in love, ghosts, gods and witches. The point is that Shakespeare did it ALL!

Everybody went to see Shakespeare's plays: children, peasants, royalty, merchants, every kind of person from every social group and clique. It was the one place where a beggar could rub elbows with the rich and famous. Remember there were no televisions, no radios, no magazines, and only the beginnings of newspapers. Not that newspapers mattered much considering most people COULDN'T read or write! Aside from the plays, there were bear-baitings, cockfights, bull-baitings and if you were lucky, the occasional execution. That was all. Seeing one of his plays was something like a cross between a Magic basketball game and a rock concert. It was noisy, crazy, usually messy, and a whole lot of fun.

Shakespeare's Early Years

William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. He died on the exact same day fifty-two years later, in 1616. He lived

during what was called the Elizabethan Era because at that time the queen of England was Queen Elizabeth I.

William Shakespeare's father, John Shakespeare, was a glovemaker by trade and ran a 'general store'. He was a prominent citizen in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon and even served as mayor for a term. The very first mention of John Shakespeare is in 1552. He was fined for keeping a 'dunghill' in front of his house. When William was eight years old, his father's fortunes started to decline. His father stopped going to church meetings and town council meetings, and his application for a coat-of-arms was turned down. A 'coat-of-arms' was an important status symbol in Elizabethan England. Today it would be like the U.S. Government and everybody else in the country recognizing that you and your family were upper class and treating you like you were somebody important. Basically, you got invited to all the 'A-List' parties. Nobody knows why John Shakespeare's mysterious decline occurred.

Shakespeare's mother was Mary Arden, a young lady from a prominent Catholic family. She married John Shakespeare in 1557 and they had seven children. William's older sisters Joan and Margaret died when they were babies. His younger sister Anne died when he was fifteen. The most of what we know about his three younger brothers is the youngest was named Edmund and that he later became an

actor in London. Edmund died at age twenty-seven and was buried in London. We don't really know much about Shakespeare's other two brothers.

As far as Shakespeare's education, even less is known. We assume he went to the local public grammar/elementary school in Stratford, but there are no records to prove it. We're also pretty sure he never went to college or university (pretty incredible when you consider Shakespeare invented over 2500 words that we still use everyday- including the words “puke”, “eyeball”, and “vulnerable”). In fact, after his baptism the next record we have of William Shakespeare is his marriage in 1582 to Anne Hathaway. William was eighteen years old when he married and Anne was twenty-six. Anne was also several months pregnant! Susanna, Shakespeare's first child, was born in 1583. Two years later, Shakespeare and Anne had twins, Judith and Hamnet. Sadly, Hamnet died only eleven years later. There is no record of his cause of death. William was deeply affected by his only son's death and after it spent more time in Stratford, traveling to London only for important theater business.

The London Years

Nobody knows exactly when William Shakespeare moved to London or how he supported himself once he got there. We do know he was an actor before he was a

playwright. Even when he was thriving as a playwright, he still found time to act in his own plays. He played roles such as Adam in *As You Like It* and the ghost of Hamlet's father in *Hamlet*.

In 1589-92, Shakespeare's first plays were all HITS in London. By 1594, Shakespeare's own acting troupe, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, became the premier acting company in London.

In 1598, Shakespeare built his famous theater- The Globe Theater. It was located on the south bank of the Thames River in London. The new theater's motto was "Totus mundus agit histrionem" or in English instead of Latin "All the world's a stage".

The Globe Theater could accommodate over 3,000 spectators and admission in the early 1600's was one penny. The Globe had twenty sides and was an "open-air" theater, meaning there was no roof in the center. What roof there was, was thatched (made of hay). The rest of the building was made of wood. From above it looked like a large donut. Performances were given every day from 2-5 in the afternoon (so the sunlight wouldn't bother the audience or the actors) except Sunday. The beginning of a show was signaled by three blasts from a trumpet and a flag raised at the same time: black for tragedy, red for history, and white for comedy. Why didn't they just pass out leaflets? Going to plays was considered immoral and

advertising for plays was prohibited. Yet, everybody came! Vendors at the shows sold beer, water, oranges, gingerbread, apples, and nuts. All of these were THROWN at the actors if the audience didn't like the show! Audience members also frequently talked back to the actors. For example, if a murderer was sneaking up on somebody, the audience usually screamed out "LOOK BEHIND YOU!"

On June 29, 1613, the Globe Theater burned to the ground. It was during a performance of *Henry the Eighth*. The cannon shots that were fired to 'announce the arrival of the king' during the first act of the play misfired and engulfed the thatched roof in flames. One man's breeches (pants) caught on fire but before he got hurt badly somebody dumped their beer on him and put it out! While the rest of the audience escaped unharmed, The Globe Theater was completely destroyed. Thirty years later, an ordinance (law) was passed to close all theatres. Acting and plays were outlawed because they were considered immoral.

The Later Years

Back in Stratford, William Shakespeare enjoyed his retirement and his status as 'Gentleman'. He purchased 'New House', the second largest home in Stratford-upon-Avon and often invited his friends and fellow artists over to hang out. One such visit is recorded in the journal of John Ward, a vicar in Stratford. He wrote,

"Shakespeare, Drayton, and Ben Johnson had a merry meeting, and it seems drank too hard, for Shakespeare died of a fever there contracted". Shakespeare indeed died thereafter and was buried in his family's church in Stratford on his birthday in 1616.

In all, Shakespeare had written over 40 plays in two years. Two members of his acting company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, published all the plays they could find in 1623. This collection of 37 of Shakespeare's plays has come to be known as The First Folio. If it had not been for these two men, John Heminges and Henry Condell, we might have no record of William Shakespeare's work and the world as we know it would be a very different place. In the preface to the Folio these men wrote, "We have but collected them (the plays) and done an office to the dead... without ambition either of self- profit or fame; only to keep the memory of so worthy a friend alive, as was our Shakespeare".

Shakespeare's friend and fellow playwright Ben Johnson wrote this about Shakespeare when William died- "... I loved the man, and do honor his memory as much as any. He was indeed honest, and of an open and free nature: had excellent fantasies, brave notions, and gentle expressions...".

The Tragedy of Hamlet

Hamlet is a tragedy written by William Shakespeare between 1599 and 1601. It outlines the Prince of Denmark's struggle to avenge his father's murder, highlighting his difficulty pursuing his sense of duty and honor in the face of not just practical difficulties but also his sense of the inconsistencies and uncertainties in the political, religious, and cultural world that make his goal of taking revenge potentially immoral or even pointless. The play is arguably the most famous revenge tragedy ever written.

Play Summary

- Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, is home from school to mourn the death of his father, King Hamlet, who has died two months earlier. Hamlet is disgusted by the marriage of his newly widowed mother, Queen Gertrude, to his Uncle, King Hamlet's brother, Claudius, who now has the throne.
- A ghost appeared to guards on nightly watch as well as Hamlet's good friend, Horatio, who thinks the spirit has a likeness to the former King Hamlet. When prompted to speak by Horatio, the ghost will not. Horatio asks Hamlet to wait for the ghost and see if it will speak to him. The ghost of his father beckons Hamlet to follow him and reveals that his brother

Claudius poisoned him in the ear. Hamlet vows to avenge his father's murder.

- Meanwhile, Laertes, son to the King's advisor Polonius is set to return to France. Before he leaves, he tells Ophelia, his sister, to be wary of Hamlet's affections towards her. Polonius gives Laertes advice on how to act abroad and orders Ophelia to stay away from Hamlet.
- Hamlet suddenly turns mad. His madness is questioned by all. Claudius and Gertrude are both concerned; Polonius suggests it is Ophelia's rejection of his advances. Claudius and Polonius decide to spy on Hamlet and Ophelia. Claudius further employs Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two childhood friends of Hamlet, to spy on him further. Hamlet quickly realizes their intentions.
- A troupe of players happens to be in town and Hamlet utilizes the actors to determine the validity of his father's murder. He will have them perform the very act of murder, killing a king through poison in the ear, which the ghost has claimed. He asks Horatio to watch Claudius' reaction throughout the play. While the court is watching, Claudius is enraged and leaves the play convincing Hamlet that he is the murderer.
- Hamlet comes upon Claudius in the chapel, kneeling down to pray. He

considers killing him then and there, but since Claudius is in mid-prayer, and will therefore go to heaven if he dies, Hamlet decides to wait until Claudius is committing some sin, so that he will go to hell like Hamlet's father before him.

- Hamlet meets Gertrude in her room and an argument ensues. When he hears Polonius who is hiding behind the curtain shout for help, he stabs him thinking it is Claudius. The ghost appears to Hamlet to refocus him on the task of killing Claudius.
- Fortinbras, Prince of Norway, whose father's lands were seized by the late King, decides to head to Denmark. Claudius demands that Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern head for England. Claudius has sent a letter with them ordering Hamlet's execution during the trip. While at sea, however, Hamlet discovers his planned murder and switches the orders, causing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to be executed. Hamlet returns to Denmark.
- Meanwhile back at Elsinore, Ophelia has gone mad with grief. Laertes returns from France and learns it was Hamlet who has killed his father, Polonius. Claudius suggests that Laertes duel with Hamlet and poisons the tip of Laertes foil for a fatal blow. If Laertes loses the duel, Claudius will put poison into a drink for Hamlet. Gertrude enters and

announces that Ophelia has drowned.

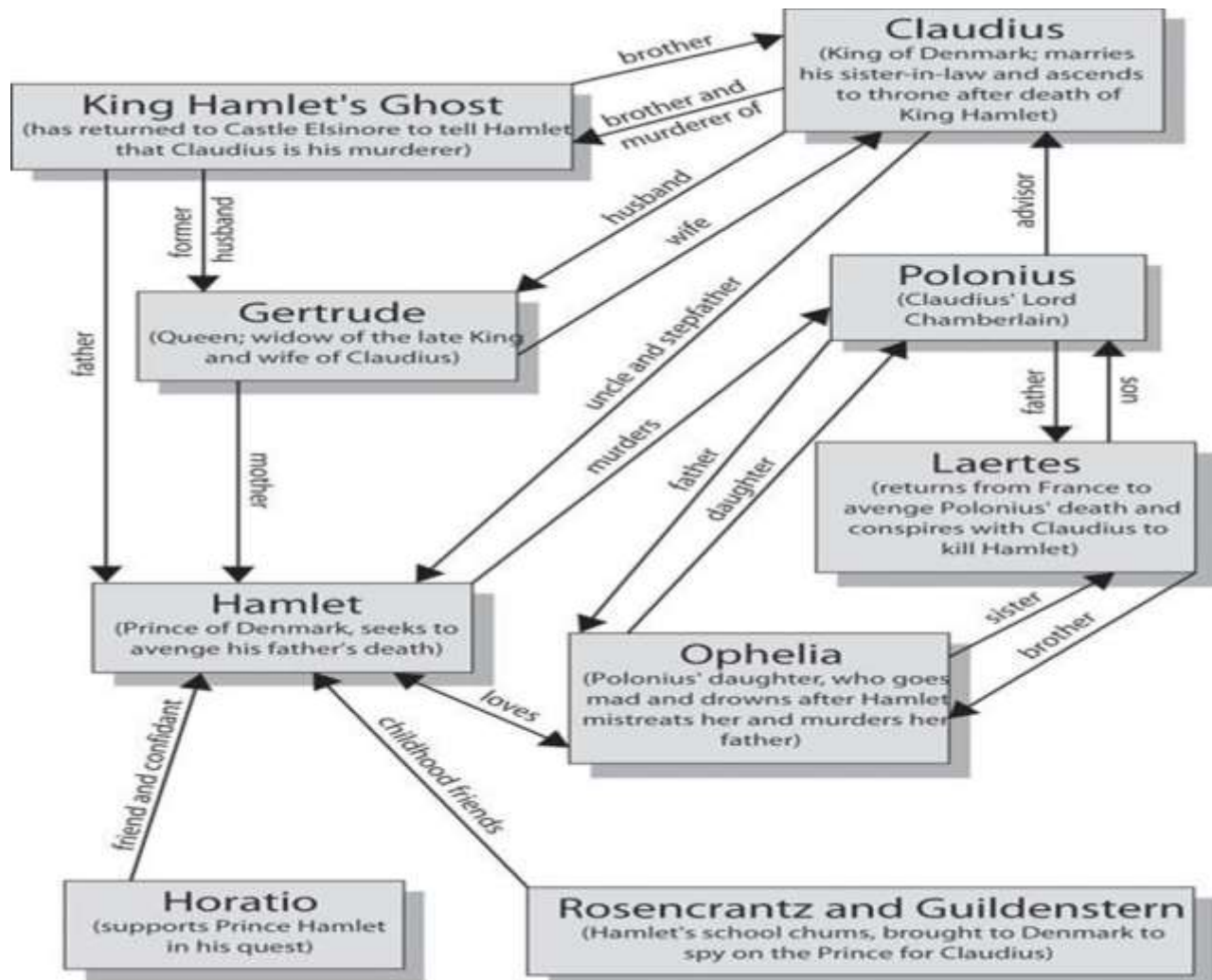
- In the graveyard, Hamlet reminisces on a friend of his whose skull he has found. When the procession arrives with Ophelia's corpse, Laertes and Hamlet argue. A duel is scheduled.
- During the fight, Gertrude accidentally drinks from the poisoned cup and dies. Hamlet is wounded with the poisoned sword, but in a scuffle, the foils are switched and Laertes is also wounded with the poisoned foil. In dying, Laertes confesses Claudius' plot to kill Hamlet. Hamlet stabs Claudius and Hamlet dies asking Horatio to tell his story. The Norwegian forces arrive at Elsinore, and Prince Fortinbras seizes control of Denmark.

List of Characters

- **Hamlet, Prince of Denmark** The crown prince of Denmark who returns from the university in Wittenberg, Germany, to find his father dead, his mother married to the king's brother Claudius, and Claudius newly self-crowned King.
- **Claudius, King of Denmark** Dead King Hamlet's brother who has usurped the throne and married his sister-in-law.
- **Gertrude, Queen of Denmark** Prince Hamlet's mother, King Hamlet's widow, King Claudius' wife.
- **The Ghost** Spirit of the late King Hamlet, condemned to walk the earth until his soul is cleansed of its sins.
- **Polonius** The elderly Lord Chamberlain, chief counselor to Claudius.
- **Horatio** A commoner, Horatio went to school with Hamlet and remains his loyal best friend.
- **Laertes** A student in Paris, Laertes is Polonius' son and Ophelia's brother; he returns from school because of King Hamlet's death,

leaves to go back to Paris, and then returns again after his own father's murder.

- **Ophelia** Daughter of Polonius, sister of Laertes, Ophelia is beloved of Hamlet.
- **Rosencrantz and Guildenstern** Classmates of Hamlet's in Wittenberg. Claudius summons them to Elsinore to spy on Prince Hamlet.
- **Fortinbras** King of Norway, bound to avenge his father's death by the Danes' hands.
- **Voltimand and Cornelius** Danish courtiers who are sent as ambassadors to the Court of Norway.
- **Marcellus and Barnardo** Danish officers on guard at the castle of Elsinore.
- **Francisco** Danish soldier on guard at the castle of Elsinore.
- **Reynaldo** Young man whom Polonius instructs and sends to Paris to observe and report on Laertes' conduct.



The Tragedy of Hamlet: Some Features

Important features of the play are

1. It was written in 1601 or 1602. It is a milestone in Shakespeare's dramatic development. He achieved artistic maturity in this work.
2. Hamlet is the longest Shakespearean play with 1,787 lines and 14,369 words.
3. This play shows the hero's struggle with two opposing forces: moral integrity and the need to
avenge his father's murder.
4. Shakespeare has used the Hamlet story, a popular story of contemporary morality plays — and other plays that featured murdered kings—to reflect the concerns of his own time.
5. Shakespeare borrowed the plot of Hamlet from other writers (there is a play called *Amleth, Prince of Denmark* written 500 years prior),
6. Hamlet faces the moral dilemma or the struggle to live within a corrupt world and yet maintain his moral integrity, but Hamlet ultimately reflects the fate of all human beings

7. The play, Hamlet has been translated into dozens of languages and staged around the world.
8. The story Hamlet is full of philosophy and Tragedy. It is a very good tragedy as everybody ends up being poisoned, murdered or committing suicide

Dramatic Technique and Style of Hamlet

2. Hamlet displays the full range of his dramatic technique, a mix of tragic and comic styles and portraying diverse characters. But , Prince Hamlet's insights, doubts, and moral dilemmas often overshadow the actions of this play.
3. The language of the play is unrhymed. This is called blank verse.
4. Shakespeare also introduced a new type of tragic hero.

Some literary Devices

1. **Aside** - a part of an actor's lines supposedly not heard by others on the stage and intended only for the audience.
2. **Monologue** - a prolonged talk or discourse by a single speaker, esp. one dominating or monopolizing a conversation.

- 3. Soliloquy** - an utterance or discourse by a person who is talking to himself or herself or is disregarding or oblivious to any hearers present (often used as a device in drama to disclose a character's innermost thoughts): Hamlet's soliloquy begins with “To be or not to be.”
- 4. Antagonist** Character in a story or poem who opposes the main character (protagonist). Sometimes the antagonist is an animal, an idea, or a thing. Examples of such antagonists might include illness, oppression, or the serpent in the biblical story of Adam and Eve.
- 5. Protagonist (Greek Play)** Main character in an ancient Greek play who usually interacts with the chorus. In a tragedy, the protagonist is traditionally a person of exalted status—such as a king, a queen, a political leader, or a military hero—who has a character flaw (inordinate pride, for example). This character flaw causes the protagonist to make an error of judgment. Additionally, the typical protagonist experiences a moment of truth in which he or she recognizes and acknowledges his or her mistakes, failures, or sins.
- 6. Mask** In the drama of ancient Greece, a face covering with exaggerated features and a mouth device to project the voice. Actors wore masks to reveal emotion or personality; to depict the trade, social class or age of a

character; and to provide visual and audio aids for audience members in the rear of the theater.

7. **Tragedy** (Greek) Verse drama written in elevated language in which a noble protagonist falls to ruin during a struggle caused by a flaw (hamartia) in his character or an error in his rulings or judgments.
8. **Tragicomedy** Play that has tragic events but ends happily. Examples are Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*.
9. **Style** Style is the way an author writes a literary work. It manifests itself in the author's choice of words and phrases, the structure of sentences, the length of paragraphs, the tone of the work, and so on. Just as painters, singers, and dancers have different styles, so too do authors. One author may use a great deal of dialogue while another author uses little. Some authors use difficult vocabulary; others use simple vocabulary.

Hamlet as a Representative Play of Elizabethan Period

These are the few facts about the play and how Elizabethan age is reflected in the story of the play:

1. Liberal views and Renaissance

The liberal views of renaissance had forced the youth like Hamlet to develop feelings of hatred and enmity towards everything that stood in conflict with their feelings. This play is a representation of renaissance youth who was reacting to the environmental forces. Examples are Hamlet, Laertes and Fortinbras who show the liberal attitude in this play.

2. Characters :

Characters represent the Elizabethan Age very accurately. Look at the examples

1. **Hamlet** the Prince of Denmark, the title character, and the protagonist is melancholic, bitter, and cynical, full of hatred for his uncle's scheming and disgust for his mother.
2. **Claudius** - the King of Denmark, Hamlet's uncle, and the play's antagonist is the villain of the play, Claudius is a calculating, ambitious politician, driven by his lust for power, but he

occasionally shows signs of guilt and human feeling. He is also a true depiction of the negative traits that Shakespeare observed in the contemporary times and loathed and wished to record in his plays.

3. **Gertrude** , the Queen of Denmark, Hamlet's mother loves Hamlet deeply, but she is a shallow, weak woman who seeks affection and status more urgently than moral rectitude or truth. This is yet another typical renaissance projection of a woman whose ambition led to her immoral acts

3. Supernaturalism and Ghost tradition

- Supernaturalism is an essential characteristic of the Elizabethan period reflected on the plays and poetry. In *Hamlet*, too, there are multiple scenes of supernatural elements. Most importantly, the **Ghost** appears several times in the play. The ghost, calls upon Hamlet to avenge his father's death. However, Hamlet speculates that the ghost might be a devil sent to deceive him and tempt him into murder. This is also a typical representation of element of mystery which was very popular in the time of Shakespeare.
- Even though the religious Reformation in England was over 60 years old by the time *Hamlet* was written, elements of Catholic belief still

linger. Shakespeare's portrayal of the Ghost reflects both Protestant and Catholic theology. Elizabethan Protestants believed ghosts were demons from hell (or sometimes angels from heaven) who took on the appearance of the dead. Catholics, on the other hand, thought ghosts were the souls of the dead. Hence the ghost element is a true representation of the Elizabethan period.

Important Characters in the Play

(A) The character of Hamlet

- Hamlet is enigmatic, tragic and a very introvert character. He is a university student whose studies are interrupted by his father's death; He is extremely philosophical and contemplative. Hamlet is extremely melancholic and discontented with the state of affairs in Denmark and in his own family. He is extremely disappointed with his mother for marrying his uncle so quickly, and he repudiates Ophelia, a woman he once claimed to love, in the harshest terms. His words often indicate his disgust with and distrust of women in general. At a number of points in the play, he contemplates his own death and even the option of suicide.
- Hamlet also behaves rashly and impulsively. When he does act, it is with surprising swiftness and little or no premeditation, as when he stabs Polonius through a curtain without even checking to see who he is. He seems to step very easily into the role of a madman, behaving erratically and upsetting the other characters. He spends relatively little time thinking about the threats to Denmark's national security from without or the threats to its stability from within (some of which he helps to create through his own carelessness).

B) The Character of Claudius

- Hamlet's major antagonist is a shrewd, lustful, conniving uncle Claudius who became the king after the murder of his own brother, the King of Denmark. Claudius is always in lust for maintaining his own power. Claudius is a corrupt politician whose main weapon is his ability to manipulate others through his skillful use of language. Claudius's love for Gertrude may be sincere, but it also seems likely that he married her as a strategic move, to help him win the throne away from Hamlet after the death of the king.
- Claudius is worried about maintaining his own power. As the play progresses, Claudius's mounting fear of Hamlet's insanity leads him to ever greater self-preoccupation; when Gertrude tells him that Hamlet has killed Polonius, Claudius does not remark that Gertrude might have been in danger, but only that he would have been in danger had he been in the room. He tells Laertes the same thing as he attempts to soothe the young man's anger after his father's death. Claudius is ultimately too crafty for his own good. In Act V, scene ii, rather than allowing Laertes only two methods of killing Hamlet, the sharpened sword and the poison on the blade,.

©The character of Gertrude

- Gertrude is the beautiful Queen of Denmark and the mother of Prince Hamlet. Gertrude seems to be a woman of desire for a fixed place and affection. She uses men to fulfill her instinct for self-preservation which makes her dependent upon the men in her life. Hamlet's comment: "Frailty, thy name is woman!" proves that Gertrude seems morally frail or weak. She is at her best in social situations when her natural grace and charm seem to indicate a rich, rounded personality.
- Gertrude is a woman defined by her desire for station and affection, as well as by her tendency to use men to fulfill her instinct for self-preservation Gertrude does seem morally frail. She never exhibits the ability to think critically about her situation, but seems merely to move instinctively toward seemingly safe choices, as when she immediately runs to Claudius after her confrontation with Hamlet. At times it seems that her grace and charm are her only characteristics, and her reliance on men appears to be her sole way of capitalizing on her abilities.

(D) The character of Ophelia

Ophelia, the only female character in the play other than Gertrude, is Polonius's daughter, Laertes's sister, and Hamlet's lover.

While she shows traits of honesty and wit, she is manipulated and controlled by the greater forces—and particularly by the men—around her.

At the beginning of the play, she and Hamlet are in an ambiguous relationship, and her father uses her to try and discover the source of Hamlet's madness, unaware that Hamlet is only pretending to be mad.

When Ophelia acts as part of her father's plan, Hamlet takes out his frustration on her, cruelly suggesting she become a nun and making inappropriate remarks.

The death of her father and abuse from Hamlet cause her to lose her mind and eventually take her own life.

In this way, she recaptures a semblance of personal agency that was unavailable to her in life.

(E) The Character of Polonius

- Polonius, a counselor to Claudius and father to Ophelia and Laertes, is a verbose, conventional, and fumbling old man.
 - His servility to the king and queen makes Hamlet doubt him, viewing the old man as spineless and deceptive.

- Polonius is desperate to stay in the good graces of the monarchs, and he devises many ways of spying on Hamlet, generally behaving in petty, meddling, and hypocritical ways.
- In an effort to eavesdrop on a conversation between Gertrude and Hamlet, he hides behind a tapestry in the queen's chambers.
- When he makes a noise, Hamlet stabs his sword through the fabric, believing that Polonius is Claudius.
- Polonius's arc ties in with the theme of appearance versus reality, as his machinations and flattery in pursuit of power make it impossible to identify his true self or intentions.

Themes

Appearance, Reality, and Self-Presentation

- *Hamlet* examines the discrepancy between how things appear and how they truly are.
 - From Hamlet's seemingly contrived insanity to Claudius's machinations, to the state of Denmark's political stability, everything in Elsinore castle is not as it seems.
 - The characters' longing to make sense of the difference between reality and fantasy leads to deception, malice, and even madness.
 - Hamlet's feigned madness causes him to truly go insane; Ophelia's decision to feign indifference to Hamlet's love causes a chasm between them; Gertrude's refusal to acknowledge that Claudius murdered her former husband causes her to disregard the truth and ignore her morals.
 - In turn, Shakespeare suggests that trying to distinguish between what is real and what is perceived often highlights the *lack* of contrast between these two things, as the way people appear—whether authentically or not—is ultimately what defines their reality.

- Throughout the play, many of the characters face a disconnect between how things seem and how they really are, but the characters also engage in deception themselves.
 - Hamlet is the prime example of this, as he pretends to be mad in order to investigate his uncle's murder of his father. He lashes out at Ophelia and Gertrude, gets Rosencrantz and Guildenstern killed, and criticizes his mother and the courtier Polonius for their false personas.
 - Despite this, he is constantly worrying about being deceived. This is seen in his monologues and soliloquies, but in the end, he is part of the same game he fears.
- Similarly, characters in the play such as the ghost of Hamlet's father, Gertrude, Polonius, and Ophelia all challenge the separation between what's seen and what's real.
 - The ghost of Hamlet's father appears to Hamlet a second time in Gertrude's room, though she claims she cannot see it.
 - This raises the possibility that the ghost is a figment of Hamlet's imagination, or that Gertrude is hiding her knowledge of his murder. The ghost inspires awe and fear in the watchmen and sentinels, while Gertrude pretends innocence.

- Furthermore, Polonius gives advice that clashes with his own decisions, and Ophelia denies her love for Hamlet to please her father.
- In the end, then, all of these characters become what they pretended to be:
 - Gertrude pretended to be an unwitting victim and becomes one, Polonius merely pretended to be a loyal subject but is genuinely mourned by the king's court after his death, and Ophelia pretended to her father that she was pure by renouncing Hamlet's affections and is ultimately given a pure and innocent burial even though the play hints she doesn't necessarily deserve it.
 - Thus, the line between appearance and reality continues to blur as the play progresses.
- Through the play, Shakespeare demonstrates the small gap between these two concepts and conveys the risks of misrepresenting the reality of one's identity.

Women in a Patriarchal Society

- In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare examines the plight of women in a fiercely patriarchal society.
 - Ophelia and Gertrude are the only primary female characters in the play, but they illustrate a broader experience of oppression and unfairness that women have faced throughout history.
 - Set in the Middle Ages and staged in the 1600s, when women were not even allowed to perform onstage, *Hamlet* reveals the limitations and prejudices women faced—even those of noble birth.
 - Although Hamlet himself resents the women in the play for their behavior and lack of loyalty, the play implies that they primarily behave this way because of the cruel and misogynistic world they inhabit—a world in which they're left with few options if they want to survive or prosper.
- Gertrude and Ophelia are often overlooked and misrepresented.
 - Hamlet himself makes harsh and biased accusations against them, and these comments reflect the misogyny of the time.

- However, he overlooks the fact that they are victims of their environment and must make difficult decisions to stay safe in a world that is built for men.
 - Gertrude is a prime example of this. After her husband's death, she remarries his brother, Claudius, who actually murdered King Hamlet.
 - Her knowledge of and involvement in the murder is ambiguous, but the play subtly hints that, though she most likely didn't have anything to do with her first husband's death, she likely knew about Claudius's scheme—and yet, she still chose to marry Claudius, likely out of fear of the possible consequences of not doing so.
 - As a woman living in a misogynistic society, she may have been killed or forced into an unfavorable marriage if she refused Claudius.
 - Therefore, Gertrude's decision to marry him could be seen as an attempt to survive in a very precarious situation.
- Ophelia's experience is similar to Gertrude's in that she is forced into decisions and situations she has no control over.

- Polonius and Claudius use her as a pawn to spy on Hamlet and try to uncover the reason for his madness.
 - Ophelia follows their orders and refuses to see or speak with him, which leads to Hamlet's wrath.
 - When her father is killed by Hamlet, Ophelia loses her sanity. Laertes is gone, and she is alone, so she begins singing nursery songs and giving away imaginary flowers.
 - In her insanity, she's still performing the expected womanly duties of the period.
- Ultimately, Ophelia takes control of her own fate and kills herself, attempting to keep her dignity and agency intact.
- Not only must Gertrude and Ophelia endure the fact that their courtly lives are the best-case scenario for women of their period, but they are also aware that they risk *losing* this privileged (but ultimately limiting) societal position if they don't comply with gendered expectations, in which case they would face even more horrific fates.
 - As a result, their decisions are driven by their desire to survive, yet Hamlet fails to recognize the gravity of their circumstances.

Honor, Religion, and Societal Values

- In *Hamlet*, both religion and an aristocratic code of honor dictate society's various norms and rules.
 - As the play progresses, Hamlet's pursuit of revenge for his father's murder leads him to a deeper understanding of the complexities of justice and honor.
 - Shakespeare illustrates that these codes are often muddled, inconsistent, and difficult to comprehend.
- As Hamlet begins to contemplate the consequences of committing murder to get revenge, he is unable to act.
 - His inability to act is not necessarily a sign of cowardice or fear, but rather a deep consideration of how retribution and violence in the name of restoring honor may not be the answer.
 - This is seen in Act 3, when he finds Claudius alone in prayer and thus has the perfect chance to kill him. Hamlet, however, worries that if he kills Claudius while he is praying, it would send his father's murderer to heaven.

- This moment is a critical turning point in the play, as it causes Hamlet to reconsider what's expected of him from a society that hypocritically glorifies both revenge *and* religious piety.
- He begins to see the artificiality of the social constructs around him, understanding that revenge is inconsistent with the Christian values ingrained in him.
- The second half of the play follows Hamlet's journey towards a more nihilistic perspective, which recognizes the randomness of the universe and the arbitrary nature of many of society's standards.
 - In his recognition of life's many hypocrisies, Hamlet resolves to take revenge with a bloody vengeance.
 - He acknowledges that all men, regardless of status, come to the same end, and he disregards Horatio's advice to heed caution when dueling Laertes, trusting instead to God's will.
 - Hamlet's recklessness is the result of realizing that the moral codes he once held to be of value are no longer applicable and, perhaps, broadly irrelevant.

- In turn, *Hamlet* probes difficult issues, inviting readers and audience members to question the status quo.
 - In his journey to fulfill societal expectations of honor, Hamlet discovers that these ideals have a different meaning than he was taught.
 - He comes face to face with the expectations and demands of society, which can be outdated and arbitrary.

Death, Corruption, and Deterioration

- When Marcellus says, “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark,” after seeing the ghost, he is referring to a superstition held by many in the era of the play (the Middle Ages): namely, that a nation's prosperity was linked to the legitimacy of its king.
 - As Hamlet works to uncover the “rotten” core of Denmark, he is shocked and dismayed by both the actual deaths he comes across *and* the figurative deaths he stumbles upon—like, for instance, the death of honor or decency.
 - In this way, Shakespeare implies that physical degradation is indicative of broader forms of spiritual, political, and social decay.

- From the outset of the play, a sense of dread and fear pervades Denmark.
 - Marcellus, Barnardo, and Francisco, three watchmen at Elsinore, express hesitation, suspicion, and skittishness when they meet. Soon, the cause of their uneasiness is revealed—the ghost of the late King Hamlet has been seen on the castle walls.
 - Hamlet and Horatio investigate and discover that Claudius, King Hamlet’s brother, murdered him and seized his throne.
 - The political corruption in Denmark deeply affects Hamlet, and he develops an obsession with physical corruption, decay, and death.

- Hamlet's preoccupation with rot and decay throughout the play reflects his (and his society's) belief that the external reflects the internal.
 - In Act 2, Hamlet describes the beauty of the world as a "foul and pestilent congregation of vapors"—a phrase that exemplifies his dark existential perspective.
 - When confronting his mother about her marriage to Claudius, Hamlet calls Claudius a "mildewed" man, referring to the "rank sweat" of their marriage bed.

- His obsession with putrefaction and decay is an expression of his fears about his own deteriorating health, as well as the declining health of his family and his nation.
- When Hamlet encounters the skull of Yorick, a former court jester, in the graveyard just beyond Elsinore, he is filled with despair.
 - This leads to one of the play's most important moments of reflection on the inevitability of death and decay. Hamlet reflects on how all the things he knew of Yorick in life—his wit, warmth, and physical attributes—are gone forever.
 - He realizes that this applies to all people, no matter how great or small. He is both saddened and comforted by the process of decay, inquiring of the gravediggers how long it takes for flesh to rot off of bones.
 - Hamlet's fixation on death shows that he feels powerless to stop what is happening in Denmark.
 - Ultimately, it is a foreign leader, Fortinbras, who takes over the Danish throne after Hamlet, Claudius, Laertes, and Gertrude all die.

- This illustrates that Denmark had to decompose completely before it could be reborn—just like human flesh decays and nourishes the soil beneath.

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Hamlet as a Tragic Hero

A tragic hero is one of the most significant elements of a Shakespearean tragedy. This type of tragedy is essentially a one-man show. It is a story about one, or sometimes two, characters. The hero may be either male or female and he or she must suffer because of some flaw of character, because of inevitable fate, or both. The hero must be *the most* tragic personality in the play. According to Andrew Cecil Bradley, a noted 20th century Shakespeare scholar, a Shakespearean tragedy “*is essentially a tale of suffering and calamity conducting to death.*” Usually the hero has to face death in the end.

An important feature of the tragic hero is that he or she is a towering personality in his/her state/kingdom/country. This person hails from the elite stratum of society and holds a high position, often one of royalty. Tragic heroes are kings, princes, or military generals, who are very important to their subjects. Take Hamlet, prince of Denmark; he is intellectual, highly educated, sociable, charming, and of a philosophic bent. The hero is such an important person that his/her death gives rise to full-scale turmoil, disturbance, and chaos throughout the land. When Hamlet takes revenge for the death of his father, he is not only killing his uncle but inviting his own death at the hands of Laertes. And as a direct result of his death, the army of Fortinbras enters Denmark to take control. Due to all of the tragedies and deaths

that occur in *Hamlet*, the play is known as a tragedy, and Hamlet is a tragic hero because he displays the traits of a tragic hero: he is a person of high rank who violates a law and he poses a threat to society and causes suffering to others through violating the law.

Hamlet is one of the most famous tragedies ever written, and in many respects, it exhibits the features traditionally associated with the tragic genre. In addition to the play ending with the death of Hamlet and a host of others, Hamlet himself is a classic tragic protagonist. As the Prince of Denmark, Hamlet is a figure whose actions matter to an entire kingdom, which means the play's events reverberate through the entire world of the play. Like other tragic heroes, he displays many admirable traits. Hamlet may have a reputation for moping around Elsinore Castle with a melancholy disposition, but this is because he grieves his beloved father's untimely death. Despite his sadness, Hamlet is an intelligent young man of great potential, as many other characters recognize.

The first trait of a tragic hero that Hamlet displays is that he is a person of high rank who violates a law. Hamlet is the Prince of Denmark, and he was in line for the throne when his father died; however, his mother remarried taking away Hamlet's chance of being king. Being the Prince of Denmark has brought Hamlet's life to the public's eye, so many people in Denmark like and respect Hamlet. Laertes even explains to Ophelia how high in rank Hamlet is that he

cannot even marry whoever he would like: “His greatness weighed, his will is not his own, for he himself is subject to his birth.

He may not, as unvalued persons do, carve for himself; for on his choice depends the safety and health of this whole state. Therefore must his choice be circumscribed unto the voice and yielding of that body whereof he is the head”.

Before Laertes’ explanation, Hamlet found out that Claudius killed his father, and he swears to avenge his father’s death by killing Claudius. Hamlet begins to go crazy while trying to find the right way and time to kill Claudius (Brooks, 1986 : 66-68).

In the middle of all of this revenge plotting, Hamlet is sent to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and Hamlet has them sentenced to death, which is another example of when Hamlet breaks the law. While trying to kill Claudius, Hamlet accidentally kills Polonius, which violates a law, so Hamlet can be seen as a tragic hero. Hamlet also kills Laertes and Claudius, so he breaks the law several times over the course of the play, which shows the characteristic of a tragic hero that a person of high rank violates a law.

Another trait of a tragic hero that Hamlet shows is that he poses a threat to society and causes suffering to others through violating a law. As previously stated, Hamlet kills multiple people which is the law that he breaks to be considered a

tragic hero. Hamlet causes many people to suffer due to these crimes, such as Ophelia, Laertes, Gertrude, Claudius, Horatio, Polonius, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet causes Ophelia to go mad because of her father's death, in which case Hamlet was the killer. This madness led Ophelia to commit suicide, which caused Gertrude, Laertes, and Hamlet to suffer. As a result of his father and sister's demise, Laertes fights Hamlet, but in the process he is killed, which causes pain for Laertes.

Hamlet also causes Claudius to suffer because he teases Claudius with the guilt of what he has done through the production that the theatre group performed. Hamlet also kills Claudius, which breaks the law and causes Claudius to suffer. Horatio suffers by Hamlet's actions because he has to deal with Hamlet's madness and problems, which drags him into the huge mess that comes with the royal family at Elsinore. Polonius' death and suffering are caused by Hamlet's actions, making him responsible for the crime (Levine, 1962 : 539-541).

Hamlet also makes Rosencrantz and Guildenstern suffer because he is the reason that they were killed; he changes a death sentence to say their names instead of his own. Hamlet suspects that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern had been playing him for a while. So after Hamlet finds a letter sentencing him to death, he changes the letter to say that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are to be sentenced to death instead.

Therefore, through all of this suffering caused by Hamlet, Hamlet definitely poses a threat to society and can be seen as a tragic hero due to his actions and crimes.

In Hamlet, Shakespeare uses the tragedies and deaths to make the play a tragedy; Hamlet is a tragic hero because he is a person of high rank who violated a law, and he poses a threat to society and causes suffering to others through violating the law, which are all characteristics of a tragic hero. Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, violates the law by killing different people such as Polonius, Laertes, Claudius, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, making him a tragic hero. Hamlet's madness leads him down this path of destruction in which he harms and kills many people. Another way that Hamlet qualifies to be a tragic hero is that he causes suffering and harm to almost everyone in the play, such as Ophelia, Laertes, Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, Horatio, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet leads to or contributes to the death of most of these characters; if Hamlet had not acted as he did, some of these characters might still be around, but through Hamlet's actions he caused many people to die or suffer, which shows that he poses a threat to society. In conclusion, Hamlet displays the traits of someone in a high rank that violates a law and of someone who poses a threat to society and causes pain for others, which make him a tragic hero, as shown throughout the play (Froula, 2001 : 77-79).

Hamlet's Tragic Flaw

Hamlet's tragic flaw is his incapacity to act decisively. His tendency to overthink and reflect on death and morality leads him to hesitate in crucial moments, such as when he struggles with the notion of avenging his father's murder and ultimately fails to take swift action against Claudius. This flaw contributes to the play's tragic outcome.

Conclusion

In all literary tragedies, the tragic hero suffers and usually dies at the end. A tragic hero is a character that makes an error in judgment that leads to their downfall. Prince Hamlet is an example of a Shakespearean tragic hero. A tragic hero must possess many good traits, but also possess a flaw that ultimately leads to his downfall. In the Shakespearean play, *Hamlet*, the tragedy of a young prince's attempt to extract revenge upon the man who murdered his father is the central idea. Throughout the play, the audience is shown Prince Hamlet's internal conflict over who killed his father. The internal conflict Prince Hamlet brings upon himself is his hesitancy to trust his own judgment and act upon it. Prince Hamlet's instances of self-doubt and indecisiveness correspond to the idea that tragic heroes lack important decision-making skills in times of distress. Prince Hamlet's

inability to make crucial decisions ultimately leads to his tragic death, and that is what makes him a tragic hero.

Different Topics in Shakespeare's Hamlet

Deception in Hamlet:

Deception is an essential element of Shakespearean drama, whether it is tragedy, history, or comedy. The deception can be destructive or benign; it can be practiced on others or, just as likely, self-inflicted. On occasion deception becomes the very foundation of a play, as is the case with *Twelfth Night*, *Othello*, and, most notably, *Hamlet*. There are many instances and examples that refer to the theme of deception in the play. Among them are the following:

Hamlet

1. Hamlet's madness is an act of deception, concocted to draw attention away from his suspicious activities as he tries to gather evidence against Claudius. He reveals to Horatio his deceitful plan to feign insanity.
2. Hamlet stages *The Murder of Gonzago*, itself an elaborate deception, to try to catch Claudius in his guilt. He again reveals his deceit to Horatio.
3. Hamlet schemes to deceive his mother, Gertrude, at their meeting in her closet. Hamlet will appear to intend her harm; he will channel the cruelty of Nero, said to have murdered his mother, to help him "speak daggers"

- to Gertrude, but he has no intention of being physically brutal.
4. When Hamlet discovers Rosencrantz and Guildenstern carrying his death warrant on the ship bound for England he changes his name to the names of his unwitting companions, thereby sending them to be executed in his place. This unusually ruthless act of deception shocks and disappoints Horatio.
 5. Hamlet's philosophical reluctance to murder Claudius results in self-deception several times in the play, particularly in his soliloquies. He convinces himself to delay in his second soliloquy because the Ghost might be playing false: "The spirit I have seen/May be a devil, and the devil hath power to assume a pleasing shape" (2.2.600), and, in his fifth soliloquy he tricks himself into believing he should not kill Claudius in his chamber (a perfect opportunity) because he would go to heaven if murdered while praying .

Claudius

- 1) Claudius lies to everyone about the murder of Hamlet's father. He expresses guilt over his deception.

2) Claudius deceives Rosencrantz and Guildenstern about Hamlet's voyage to England, telling them that the lunatic Hamlet must leave Denmark in the interest of public safety. In truth Claudius plans Hamlet's assassination once he is on English soil.

Polonius

2) Polonius deceives Laertes when he gives him his blessing to go to Paris but sends Reynaldo to spy on his every action.

3) Polonius deceives Hamlet when he, for the benefit of Claudius, arranges for Ophelia to meet Hamlet by accident to determine whether his irrational behavior is the result of "the affliction of his love" (3.1.36). So skilled is Polonius at the art of deceit that he has Ophelia pretend to read a prayer book to deflect any suspicion that might arise from her lurking alone in the corridor.

4) Again Polonius deceives Hamlet when he hides behind the arras to spy on Hamlet's conversation with his mother (3.3.28). This time, however, Polonius pays for his deceit with his life, as Hamlet pierces him through the curtain, believing he is Claudius .

Even More Deception:

One could cite numerous additional examples of deception in Hamlet: Horatio is deceptive by being a willing participant in Hamlet's plot to "catch the conscience of the king" (2.2.606); Ophelia deceives Hamlet by remaining silent about her father's manipulative behavior (2.1.107-9) and (3.1.43-9); Fortinbras lies to his uncle about his plan to attack Denmark (1.2.28-30); Rosencrantz and Guildenstern deceive Hamlet about their voyage to England; Laertes lies to Hamlet about the poison-tipped sword he wields in the duel; and so on .

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The Corruption in Hamlet:

Central to the plot and the themes developed in Shakespeare's Hamlet, are the varying elements of corruption which occur during the play. This is echoed in Marcellus' famous comment of 'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark,' when Hamlet is beckoned away by the Ghost (1.4.90). As the play continues and the story unfolds, it becomes apparent that there truly is 'something rotten in the state of Denmark,' and rather that it is not just one 'something,' but many things.

The most obvious example of corruption is the story of the late King Hamlet's murder by his brother Claudius. When Prince Hamlet goes to speak with the Ghost he learns that his father's death was not an accident, as was officially reported, but instead that it was a murder committed by King Hamlet's brother who 'Now wears his crown' (1.5.39). While this act was committed before the play even begins, it sets the stage for all the events which follow, descending into a state just as corrupt as this first crime.

The second element of corruption is the soon following marriage of the widowed Queen to Claudius, the murderer of her husband. While the Queen does not know that Claudius killed her former husband, her part in the relationship is not wholly innocent. Her mourning seems minimal and her lustfulness maximal, for 'But two months dead' (1.2.138) was the King before 'She married . . . With such dexterity to incestuous sheets' (1.2.156-157). This image of a corrupted or damned royalty is strongly played up, especially by Hamlet, who recognizes this new union of Claudius and his mother as incredibly demeaning to the state of Denmark, and a direct affront to his father, who in his image was quite the opposite, being great and pure and honest.

The third element of corruption in the play is the manner in which the court of Denmark functions. It is a game of favors, a constant play, with the director as the King, his subjects the players, and none more prominent than Polonius, the royal advisor. Polonius' two main faults lie in his flattering manner and his continuous spying. While he tells his daughter Ophelia that Hamlet is not true in his affections, he explains to the King that he warned Ophelia against Hamlet because the Prince is far above her station in life. Polonius perceives himself to be witty and tries to weasel his way around with actions and words to best fit the situation and above all benefit himself. His inclination to spy on people is obvious for he sends a man to France to find out how his son is behaving, he spies on his daughter while she is with Prince Hamlet, and he hides behind the arras to listen to the confrontation between the Queen and Hamlet. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern also try to win favor with the King, foregoing any friendship they once had with Hamlet, to 'play upon [him] acting as little more than spies for the King, feigning friendship to obtain Hamlet's secrets.

The fourth element is that Hamlet is full of death and murder, elements which seem almost to occur in a continual flow, accelerating as the play progresses. It begins with the King's murder by Claudius, before the play actually opens, although the audience only hears of this. Next is the re-enactment of this murder

during the play which Hamlet stages for the members of court, and while it is not a real murder it is the first time the audience sees the act. The fatalities increase with the first true murder when Polonius is slain by Hamlet, and followed soon after by the suicide of Ophelia. Next in line are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who are sent unknowingly to their death by Hamlet, in a casual manner that is 'not near [his] conscience,' suggesting that by this point in the play death is almost commonplace (5.2.58). The final scene commences in a blood bath, with the deaths of King Claudius, Queen Gertrude, Laertes and Hamlet. Only Horatio, the one person who remained essentially neutral and separate from the royal court, still has his life at the end of the play.

From Claudius' simple plan to kill the King, so he could take the crown and marry the Queen, come deadly consequences which reach far beyond his own guilty head, affecting the whole state of Denmark. By using murder and deception to gain the throne, as soon as Claudius assumes it, it is irrevocably tainted. Marrying the brother of her dead husband, the Queen's bed becomes 'A couch for luxury and damned insect' (1.5.83). The games and favors played to please the King, the spying, the secrets kept, and the lies told, all come back with a sentence of death. Even the fight between Hamlet and Laertes is not fair, with a poison tipped weapon and a poisoned drink, conspiracies of the King to ensure Hamlet's death, but which

claim the life of the Queen, Laertes, and himself also. All of these events culminate in Act V to eventually destroy the royalty of Denmark with no member surviving the duration of the play, proving for any doubting member of the audience that something truly was 'rotten in the state of Denmark.

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Death in Hamlet

Generally speaking, Hamlet is a play that reeks of death. Death is everywhere in it. Some deaths are planned such as the death of Hamlet the father, Prince Hamlet, Claudius and Laertes. There are other deaths that are not planned. Hamlet accidentally killed Polonius--thinking he was Claudius, and Gertrude is accidentally poisoned by Claudius--who meant to kill Hamlet with poisoned wine, and Ophelia committed suicide. Death is explored in every facet of the play, and from so many different angles. It is woven through almost every line and portrayed in so many images.

Death can be perceived through different approaches. In the play Hamlet, Hamlet contemplates death from numerous perspectives. Being obsessed with the idea of

death, he openly expresses his opinion of death through his deeds and sayings. For him, death can be approached through the following three attitudes:

1- Emotional death:

Emotionally, Hamlet is attached to death when his father and his lover Ophelia died. After their death, Hamlet has found no joy or happiness in his world. He finds the world an empty place to live in. His reaction toward their death symbolizes his respect he has towards death.

2- Physical death:

To know something theoretically is completely different from knowing it practically. Hamlet has the chance to be very near with some incidents that make to deal closely with physical death. He ponders the physical aspects of death. This happens with him when seeing Yoricks's skull, his father's ghost, as well as the dead bodies in the cemetery.

3- Spiritual death:

Hamlet also contemplates the spiritual aspects of the afterlife with his various soliloquies. The following soliloquy is a good example:

"To be, or not to be? That is the question—" (Act 3, Scene 1)

In this famous soliloquy, Hamlet is experiencing despair, and thinking about committing suicide. He is pretending to be mad, as part of his plot against Claudius, and to reject Ophelia, causing her great pain. The main themes addressed in this soliloquy are despair, suicide, and madness.

In conclusion, Hamlet, one might argue, is Shakespeare's most famous play for the simple reason that it is wholly centered around death. Therefore, it can never become dated and will always hold an irresistible allure for audiences. The reason behind this is that death will forever remain the greatest timeless mystery of the world.

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Hamlet as a Revenge Play

The concept of revenge is one of the most important aspects of human nature that Shakespeare insisted to present in his works. It is a central theme in almost every work written by him. The act of revenge attracts the attention of all human beings because it raises an important question that is related to human life: How does one

seek justice when the law ceases to function properly? Dealing with the idea of human fascination for the act of revenge, Shakespeare wrote Hamlet as distinguished model of an Elizabethan revenge play.

Hamlet has been sub-categorized as a revenge play. A revenge play is a genre that was popular in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. Seneca, the Roman poet and philosopher who had a strong influence on Shakespeare, is said to be the father of such revenge tragedy.

There are certain basic elements that are necessary to any revenge play. Among them are the following. Firstly, a revenge play must include a hero who has a serious grievance against an enemy; he must avenge an evil deed. Secondly, a revenge play must include death scenes, mad scenes, a vengeful ghost, and one or several gory scenes. Thirdly, a revenge play must include a play within a play and sub-plays or sub-plots. Fourthly, a revenge play ends with the violent death of the hero.

Looking deeply at Hamlet, one can easily find that it has all the previously mentioned elements of a revenge play. The hero of the play is Hamlet who has a serious problem with his uncle (Polonius) and this drives him to avenge his evil deeds. Besides, the play includes a vengeful ghost, many mad scenes, death scenes, and several gory scenes. The play includes a play within a play and subplots. The play ends with the violent death of Hamlet.

In Hamlet, Shakespeare uses revenge as the major force that drives the action of the play. To achieve this, he provides the play with, not one, but three revenge plots; they are interwoven together in a fantastic way. Moreover, Shakespeare makes acts of revenge in the play pass through four stages. The first stage is to find a motivation for the action. The second is to have an action plan. The third is to activate this action plan. The final stage is to show the consequences of achieving the action plan.

Hamlet and Revenge:

Hamlet is the center of the first revenge plot of the play. His act of revenge can be investigated through four successive stages. The first stage is represented in his motivations for the act of revenge. Hamlet wants to revenge against his uncle

(Claudius) because the murder of his father. Hamlet's revenge is introduced when the ghost of his father speaks to him for the first time.

The second stage includes the action plan that was arranged by Hamlet to revenge against his uncle. After talking with his father's ghost, Hamlet comes to know the severe truth: It is his uncle who killed his father; it was not by a snake's sting as he was told before. As a result, hamlet decides to kill his uncle. But, he will not go directly and kill him at once. Besides, as a part of his action plan, Hamlet decided that he should let his uncle knows that he had known the truth. This is why he put on a play entitled "The Mousetrap" in front of his uncle before jumping into conclusions.

The third stage includes the activation of Hamlet's action plan. While he was talking with his mother inside her room, he noticed that there was somebody behind the curtains. He directly killed him thinking that he is Claudius. Unfortunately, it was Polonius (the father of Laertes and Ophelia). Undoubtedly, this behavior increased the complexity of the situation. Later on, Hamlet renewed his decision of killing Claudius, but when he found him praying, he decided to postpone the action. He did so because he did not want Claudius enter the Paradise because of his death while praying. On the contrary, he wanted to kill him in other

circumstances in order to go to the Hell directly. At last, Hamlet managed to kill Claudius with the poisoned sword and forced him to drink the poisoned wine.

The fourth and last stage includes the consequences of the revenge action. The direct result of this revenge is the death of Hamlet himself. Besides, he killed other persons directly and indirectly. The most important result is that he lost the throne and greatness forever.

Laertes and Revenge:

Laertes is the main concern of the second revenge plot of the play. His act of revenge can be investigated through four successive stages. The first stage shows his motivations for the act of revenge. He wants to revenge against Hamlet because the latter was responsible for the direct death of his father (Polonius) and the indirect death of his sister, Ophelia. The second stage includes the action plan that was decided by Laertes to revenge against Hamlet. His action plan included an agreement with Polonius to poison the wine that Hamlet should drink. Besides, he decided to poison the tip of the sword that he should use when fighting with Hamlet.

The third stage deals with the activation of Hamlet's action plan. Claudius did his best to urge Laertes to get rid of Hamlet via informing him that Hamlet is the one who killed his father. Laertes reacts immediately with no further thought at all. He had a strong feeling that Hamlet needed to be killed. While Laertes did not manage to kill Hamlet while fighting together at the graveyard, he managed to wound him by the poisoned sword. This wound led to Hamlet's death. The fourth and last stage includes the consequences of the revenge action. The direct result of this revenge is the death of Laertes himself. Besides, he killed Hamlet. In doing so, Laertes lost everything.

Fortinbras and Revenge:

Fortinbras is the subject of the third revenge plot of the play. His act of revenge can be investigated through four successive stages. The first stage includes his motivations for the act of revenge. Because of the slaying of his father (King Fortinbras of Norway) by Hamlet's father (King Hamlet of Denmark), young Fortinbras (the son) seeks revenge against Denmark. In the opening scene, we know that Fortinbras wishes to reclaim the lands lost to Denmark. The second stage is represented in the action plan that was decided by Fortinbras to revenge

against Denmark. He prepared a big and strong army to restore the throne of his father. This cannot happen without getting rid of those who killed and replaced his father.

The third stage includes the activation of Hamlet's action plan. Fortinbras took his way to Denmark to restore the throne. Before his arrival, he heard of the death of Hamlet and his uncle. The fourth and last stage includes the consequences of the revenge action. Before his last breath, Hamlet names Fortinbras the new King of Denmark. This makes Fortinbras's revenge complete. Thus, he becomes the new ruler of Denmark.

In conclusion:

Revenge is the driving force of Hamlet, Laertes and Fortinbras. It is what brings about the death of Hamlet and Laertes and the rise of Fortinbras. All of them strongly insisted on applying the principle of an eye for an eye. Hamlet waits too long to take his revenge, and then acts suddenly and thoughtlessly. However, the same spontaneous and hasty pursuit of revenge also brings about Laertes' death. Ironically, Hamlet and Laertes (and Claudius as well) all die by the same sword because of their blind fury and lack of wisdom. Only Fortinbras acts smartly and

with a keen eye. Because of his steadfastness and patience he is able to exact his revenge and live through it as well. In a word, Shakespeare wants to say that when revenge is taken rashly, rather than through reason, leads to downfall.

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Three plots in Shakespeare's Hamlet:

There are three plots in Shakespeare's Hamlet: the main revenge plot and two subplots involving the romance between Hamlet and Ophelia, and the looming war with Norway. The following is a guide to the main plot, with a look at all the significant events on Hamlet's journey for vengeance.

Characters Involved in the Revenge Plot of Hamlet

Hamlet

Ghost

Claudius

Gertrude

Polonius

Laertes

Horatio

Key Revenge Plot Events

1. The ghost of Hamlet's father appears to Horatio, Marcellus, and Barnardo. Horatio begs the apparition to speak (1.1.127), but it refuses. Horatio reports the encounter to Hamlet .

2. The Ghost appears to Hamlet and they leave to speak in private .

4. The Ghost reveals that he is, in fact, the ghost of Hamlet's father. The revenge plot is established with the Ghost's utterance, "So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear" (1.5.7). He tells Hamlet that he was poisoned by his brother Claudius as he slept in his orchard and, if Hamlet is not already feeling the desire, the Ghost makes plain the demand: "Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder" .

5. To be certain of Claudius's guilt, Hamlet decides to re-enact the murder of his father with the production of *The Murder of Gonzago* (known also as

the play within the play or The Mousetrap). If Claudius is disturbed by the play it will reveal his guilt.

6. Hamlet stages The Murder of Gonzago and Hamlet and Horatio agree that the agitated Claudius has behaved like a guilty man during the production (3.2.284 .(
7. Hamlet has an opportunity to kill the unattended Claudius in his chamber, but, after soliloquizing on the matter, he decides not to take action because Claudius is praying. Killing Claudius in prayer would not really be revenge because he would go to heaven, "fit and season'd for his passage" (3.3.86 .(
8. Hamlet kills Polonius, mistaking him for Claudius as he hides behind a curtain. (3.4.22 (
9. The Ghost appears again to Hamlet. He is angry because Claudius is still alive. He tells Hamlet he has returned to "whet thy almost blunted purpose" (3.4.111 .(

- 10.** Claudius banishes Hamlet to England for the murder of Polonius (4.3.46). He sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to spy on Hamlet's actions (55) and makes plans to have Hamlet assassinated on English soil .
- 11.** Horatio receives a letter from Hamlet reporting that he is returning to Denmark, thanks to pirates who had captured his boat and released him on the promise of future reward (4.6.11 .(
- 12.** Claudius hears of Hamlet's return and he conspires with Laertes, Polonius's son, to murder Hamlet. Laertes will use a poison-tipped sword during a fight with Hamlet, and Claudius will have a poisoned drink at the ready (4.7.126-161 .(
- 13.** Hamlet stabs Claudius (5.2.311) and forces him to drink the poisoned wine (316). The revenge plot is thus concluded. Hamlet himself then dies from the wound received during the fight with Laertes.

The Hamlet and Ophelia Subplot:

There are three plots in Shakespeare's Hamlet: the main revenge plot and two subplots involving the romance between Hamlet and Ophelia, and the looming war with Norway. The following is a guide to the significant events in the Hamlet and Ophelia subplot.

Characters Involved in the Hamlet and Ophelia Subplot

Hamlet

Ophelia

Laertes

Polonius

Key Events in the Hamlet and Ophelia Subplot

1. Laertes warns his sister, Ophelia, that Hamlet's love is fleeting. Her father, Polonius, also fears that Hamlet will make false vows, and so he demands she end their relationship. Ophelia agrees and Laertes leaves for Paris. (1.2 (

2. Hamlet appears in Ophelia's chamber, pale and disheveled. His condition frightens her and she runs to tell Polonius about the encounter. Polonius assumes Ophelia's rejection of Hamlet has driven him insane. (2.1 (
3. Polonius reports Hamlet's strange behavior to Claudius, presenting a love letter from Hamlet to Ophelia. (2.2(
4. At the urging of Claudius, Polonius sends Ophelia to learn more about Hamlet's condition. She greets him and he verbally assaults her. (3.1(
5. Hamlet, in his mother's chamber, hears someone hiding behind a drape. Thinking it is Claudius, Hamlet stabs through the fabric and mortally wounds Polonius. Hamlet drags Polonius's body out of the room. (3.4 (
6. Hamlet's malicious behavior and Polonius's murder have rendered Ophelia completely insane. Laertes blames Hamlet for his sister's condition and vows revenge. (4.5(
7. Hamlet's mother brings news that Ophelia has drowned. (4.7(
8. Hamlet and Horatio encounter Ophelia's funeral procession. Hamlet is overcome with grief and cries, "I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers/Could

not, with all their quantity of love/Make up my sum." (5.1.270-72 (

9. Hamlet and Laertes duel and they both receive fatal wounds from Laertes's poisoned-tipped sword. Before they die they exchange words of forgiveness and the subplot of Hamlet and Ophelia comes to a close. (5.2 (

The Norway Subplot in Hamlet:

There are three plots in Shakespeare's Hamlet: the main revenge plot and two subplots involving the romance between Hamlet and Ophelia, and the looming war with Norway. The following is a guide to the significant events in the Norway subplot.

Characters Involved in the Norway Subplot

Hamlet

Fortinbras

Horatio

Claudius

Cornelius

Voltimand

Osric

Key Events in the Norway Subplot

1. Horatio sees the ghost of Hamlet's father and describes him as wearing the same armour as "When he the ambitious Norway combated" (1.1.60). This passage (1.1.58-63) introduces the Norway subplot.
2. After the Ghost vanishes, Horatio explains that King Hamlet (Prince Hamlet's father) had slain King Fortinbras of Norway in combat and reclaimed land for Denmark. He adds that young Fortinbras "Of unimproved mettle hot and full" (1.1.96) is massing an army to win back the land that King Hamlet had taken. Horatio mistakenly assumes that King Hamlet's ghost is an ominous portent of the looming war (1.1.109 .(
3. King Claudius addresses the threat from Prince Fortinbras, and he reveals that Fortinbras is seeking his revenge on Denmark without the knowledge of the

sitting king of Norway. Claudius decides to send Cornelius and Voltimand with a letter to the king of Norway, requesting he restrain his hot-blooded young nephew .

4. Cornelius and Voltimand return from their trip (2.2.59) and report that the king had been aware of Fortinbras' gathering of troops, but he thought the attack would be on Poland. When he discovered Fortinbras' sights were on Denmark he became livid and ordered Fortinbras to desist immediately. Voltimand adds that Fortinbras made a vow before his uncle "never more/To give the assay of arms" (2.2.71) against Claudius. Fortinbras will redirect his conflict to Poland .

5. Hamlet, on his way to exile in England, meets a captain in Fortinbras' army. He learns that Fortinbras and his army are marching to Poland to regain "a little patch of ground/That hath no profit in it but the name" (4.4.19). Hamlet is fascinated by Fortinbras' willingness to die over something so insignificant, and the encounter prompts Hamlet's final soliloquy: How all occasions do inform against me (4.4.35-69).(

6. Hamlet and Laertes fight and mortally wound each other. Just before Hamlet

dies, Osric announces that Fortinbras has returned from Poland. Hamlet, now ruler of Denmark due to Claudius' death earlier in the scene, decrees that valiant young Prince Fortinbras will be his royal heir and asks Horatio to inform Fortinbras of all that has led Hamlet to his lamentable end. Fortinbras takes charge and both the subplot and the play are concluded with Fortinbras' speech.

Hamlet's Seven Soliloquies

1 Act I scene 2 lines 129–59

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt

Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!

Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd

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 follow'd my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears:—why she, even she—
O, God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason,
Would have mourn'd 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 galled 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.

Hamlet is suicidally depressed by his father's death and mother's remarriage. He is disillusioned with life, love and women. Whether 'sullied' (Q2) or 'solid'

(F) flesh, the reference is to man's fallen state. This is the fault of woman, because of Eve's sin, and because the misogynistic medieval church had decreed that the father supplied the spirit and the mother the physical element of their offspring. Both words apply equally well, linking with the theme of corruption or the imagery of heaviness, but 'solid' is more subtle and fits better with the sustained metaphor of 'melting', 'dew' and 'moist', and the overarching framework of the four hierarchical elemental levels in the play: fire, air, water and earth. Melancholy was associated with a congealing of the blood, which also supports the 'solid' reading. In all likelihood it is a deliberate pun on both words by the dramatist and Hamlet. (A third reading of 'sallied' in Q1, meaning assaulted/assailed, links to the imagery of battle and arrows.)

Other imagery concerns a barren earth, weed-infested and gone to seed, making the soliloquy an elegy for a world and father lost. Hamlet condemns his mother for lack of delay, and is concerned about her having fallen 'to incestuous sheets'.

His attitude to his dead father, his mother and his new father are all made clear to the audience here, but we may suspect that he has a habit of exaggeration and strong passion, confirmed by his use of three names of mythological characters.

His reference to the sixth commandment

— thou shalt not kill — and application of it to suicide as well as murder introduces the first of many Christian precepts in the play and shows Hamlet to be concerned about his spiritual state and the afterlife. Many of the play's images and themes are introduced here, in some cases with their paired opposites: Hyperion versus satyr; heart versus tongue; heaven versus earth; 'things rank and gross in nature'; memory; reason.

2 Act I scene 5 lines 92–112

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage wann'd,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit? and all for nothing!

For Hecuba!

What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her? What would he do,
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
Make mad the guilty and appal the free,
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
The very faculties of eyes and ears. Yet I,
A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
And can say nothing; no, not for a king,
Upon whose property and most dear life
A damn'd defeat was made. Am I a coward?
Who calls me villain? breaks my pate across?
Plucks off my beard, and blows it in my face?
Tweaks me by the nose? gives me the lie i' the throat,
As deep as to the lungs? who does me this?
Ha!

'Swounds, I should take it: for it cannot be

But I am pigeon-liver'd and lack gall
To make oppression bitter, or ere this
I should have fatted all the region kites
With this slave's offal: bloody, bawdy villain!
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!
O, vengeance!
Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,
And fall a-cursing, like a very drab,
A scullion!
Fie upon't! foh! About, my brain! I have heard
That guilty creatures sitting at a play
Have by the very cunning of the scene
Been struck so to the soul that presently
They have proclaim'd their malefactions;
For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
With most miraculous organ. I'll have these players
Play something like the murder of my father

Before mine uncle: I'll observe his looks;
I'll tent him to the quick: if he but blench,
I know my course. The spirit that I have seen
May be the devil: and the devil hath power
To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me: I'll have grounds
More relative than this: the play 's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.

Having heard the Ghost's testimony, Hamlet becomes distressed and impassioned. He is horrified by the behaviour of Claudius and Gertrude and is convinced he must avenge his father's murder. This speech is duplicative, contains much tautology, and is fragmented and confused. To reveal his state of shock he uses rhetorical questions, short phrases, dashes and exclamations, and jumps from subject to subject. God is invoked three times. The dichotomy between head and heart is mentioned again.

3 Act II scene 2 lines 546–603

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage wann'd,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his conceit? and all for nothing!
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What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
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And can say nothing; no, not for a king,
Upon whose property and most dear life
A damn'd defeat was made. Am I a coward?
Who calls me villain? breaks my pate across?
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More relative than this: the play 's the thing

Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.

Hamlet's mood shifts from self-loathing to a determination to subdue passion and follow reason, applying this to the testing of the Ghost and his uncle with the play. The first part of the speech mirrors the style of the First Player describing Pyrrhus, with its short phrasing, incomplete lines, melodramatic diction and irregular metre. This is a highly rhetorical speech up to line 585, full of lists, insults and repetitions of vocabulary, especially the word 'villain'; this suggests he is channelling his rage and unpacking his heart with words in this long soliloquy, railing impotently against himself as well as Claudius. He then settles into the gentler and more regular rhythm of thought rather than emotion. The irony being conveyed is that cues for passion do not necessarily produce it in reality in the same way that they do in fiction, and that paradoxically, deep and traumatic feeling can take the form of an apparent lack of, or even inappropriate, manifestation.

4 Act III scene 1 lines 56–89

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,

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;
[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;
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
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
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.—Soft you now!
The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins remember'd.*

This was originally the third soliloquy in Q1, and came before the entry of the Players. In Q2 it has been moved to later. Some directors therefore place this most famous of soliloquies at II.2.171, but this has the effect of making Hamlet appear to be meditating on what he has just been reading rather than on life in general whereas the Act III scene 1 placing puts the speech at the centre of the play, where Hamlet has suffered further betrayals and has more reason to entertain suicidal thoughts. The speech uses the general 'we' and 'us', and makes no reference to Hamlet's personal situation or dilemma. Although traditionally played as a soliloquy, technically it is not, as Ophelia appears to be overtly present (and in some productions Hamlet addresses the speech directly to her) and Claudius and

Polonius are within earshot. At the time this was a standard ‘question’ (this being a term used in academic disputation, the way the word ‘motion’ is now used in debating): whether it is better to live unhappily or not at all. As always, Hamlet moves from the particular to the general, and he asks why humans put up with their burdens and pains when they have a means of escape with a ‘bare bodkin’.

Hamlet also questions whether it is better to act or not to act, to be a passive stoic like Horatio or to meet events head on, even if by taking up arms this will lead to one’s own death, since they are not to be overcome. There is disagreement by critics (see Rossiter, p. 175) as to whether to ‘take up arms against a sea of troubles’ ends one’s opponent or oneself, but it would seem to mean the latter in the context. Although humans can choose whether to die or not, they have no control over ‘what dreams may come’, and this thought deters him from embracing death at this stage. Although death is ‘devoutly to be wished’ because of its promise of peace, it is to be feared because of its mystery, and reason will always counsel us to stick with what we know. Strangely, the Ghost does not seem to count in Hamlet’s mind as a ‘traveller’ who ‘returns’. Given that Hamlet has already concluded that he cannot commit suicide because ‘the Everlasting had...fixed/His canon ’gainst self-slaughter’, there is no reason to think he has changed his mind about such a fundamental moral and philosophical imperative.

C. S. Lewis claims that Hamlet does not suffer from a fear of dying, but from a fear of being dead, of the unknown and unknowable. However, Hamlet later comes to see that this is a false dichotomy, since one can collude with fate rather than try futilely to resist it, and then have nothing to fear. The ‘conscience’ which makes us all cowards probably means conscience in the modern sense, as it does in ‘catch the conscience of the King’ (II.2.603). However, its other meaning of ‘thought’ is equally appropriate, and the double meaning encapsulates the human condition: to be capable of reason means inevitably to recognise one’s guilt, and both thought and guilt make us fear punishment in the next life. With the exception of Claudius, intermittently and not overridingly, and Gertrude after being schooled by Hamlet, no other character in the play shows evidence of having a conscience in the sense of being able to judge oneself and be self-critical.

This has a slower pace than the previous soliloquies, a higher frequency of adjectives, metaphors, rhythmical repetitions, and regular iambics. Hamlet’s melancholy and doubt show through in the use of hendiadys, the stress on disease, burdens, pain and weapons, and the generally jaundiced world view. The ‘rub’ referred to in line 65 is an allusion to an obstacle in a game of bowls which deflects the bowl from its intended path, and is yet another indirection metaphor.

What is the question Hamlet is asking in his fourth soliloquy?

The following interpretations are offered by the editors of the Arden edition (p. 485), who favour the first one.

- 1 He is comparing the advantages and disadvantages of being alive and only tangentially recognising that man has the power to escape a painful existence by committing suicide.
- 2 The 'question' concerns the abstract choice between life and death and focuses on suicide throughout, but as a concept only.
- 3 Hamlet is debating whether to end his own life.
- 4 The question is whether or not Hamlet should kill Claudius.
- 5 Hamlet is persuading himself that he wishes to proceed with revenge and that he must not let thought interfere.
- 6 The speech is asking whether one should act or not act as a general principle and practice.

5 Act III scene 2 lines 395–406

O, my offence is rank it smells to heaven;

It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,

A brother's murder. Pray can I not,

Though inclination be as sharp as will:

My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent;

And, like a man to double business bound,

I stand in pause where I shall first begin,

And both neglect. What if this cursed hand

Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,

Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens

To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy

But to confront the visage of offence?

And what's in prayer but this two-fold force,

To be forestalled ere we come to fall,

**Or pardon'd being down? Then I'll look up;
My fault is past. But, O, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder'?**
**That cannot be; since I am still possess'd
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition and my queen.
May one be pardon'd and retain the offence?
In the corrupted currents of this world
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law: but 'tis not so above;
There is no shuffling, there the action lies
In his true nature; and we ourselves compell'd,
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
To give in evidence. What then? what rests?**

Try what repentance can: what can it not?

Yet what can it when one can not repent?

O wretched state! O bosom black as death!

O limed soul, that, struggling to be free,

Art more engaged! Help, angels! Make assay!

Bow, stubborn knees; and, heart with strings of steel,

Be soft as sinews of the newborn babe!

All may be well.

Now Hamlet feels ready to proceed against the guilty Claudius. He is using the stereotypical avenger language and tone in what the Arden edition calls ‘the traditional night-piece apt to prelude a deed of blood’ (p. 511). He is aping the previous speaker’s mode as so often, trying to motivate himself to become a stage villain, by identifying with Lucianus, the nephew to the king. This is the least convincing of his soliloquies because of the crudity of the clichéd utterance, and one suspects it is a leftover from an earlier version of the revenge play. The emphasis at the end, however, is on avoiding violence and showing concern for his own and his mother’s souls; his great fear is of being ‘unnatural’, behaving as a monster like Claudius. He is, however, impressionable to theatrical performance,

as we saw from his reaction to the Pyrrhus/Hecuba speeches earlier, and this carries him through to the slaying of Polonius before it wears off and, if we can believe it, ‘A weeps for what is done’. This soliloquy creates tension for the audience, who are unsure of how his first private meeting with his mother will turn out and how they will speak to each other. He mentions his ‘heart’ and ‘soul’ again.

6 Act III scene 3 lines 73–96

O, my offence is rank it smells to heaven;

It hath the primal eldest curse upon’t,

A brother’s murder. Pray can I not,

Though inclination be as sharp as will:

My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent;

And, like a man to double business bound,

I stand in pause where I shall first begin,

And both neglect. What if this cursed hand

Were thicker than itself with brother’s blood,

**Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy
But to confront the visage of offence?
And what's in prayer but this two-fold force,
To be forestalled ere we come to fall,
Or pardon'd being down? Then I'll look up;
My fault is past. But, O, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder'?
That cannot be; since I am still possess'd
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition and my queen.
May one be pardon'd and retain the offence?
In the corrupted currents of this world
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice,
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself**

Buys out the law: but 'tis not so above;

There is no shuffling, there the action lies

In his true nature; and we ourselves compell'd,

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Art more engaged! Help, angels! Make assay!

Bow, stubborn knees; and, heart with strings of steel,

Be soft as sinews of the newborn babe!

All may be well.

Hamlet decides not to kill Claudius while he is praying, claiming that this would send him to heaven, which would not be a fitting punishment for a man who killed his father unprepared for death and sent him to purgatory. For Hamlet revenge

must involve justice. It begins with a hypothetical ‘might’, as if he has already decided to take no action, confirmed by the single categorical word ‘No’ in line 87, the most decisive utterance in the play. The usual diction is present: ‘heaven’ (4), ‘hell’, ‘black’, ‘villain’ (2), ‘sickly’, ‘soul’ (2), ‘heavy’, ‘thought’, ‘act’.

7 Act IV scene 4 lines 32–66

How all occasions do inform against me,

And spur my dull revenge! What is a man,

If his chief good and market of his time

Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.

Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,

Looking before and after, gave us not

That capability and god-like reason

To fust in us unused. Now, whether it be

Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple

Of thinking too precisely on the event,

A thought which, quarter’d, hath but one part wisdom

And ever three parts coward, I do not know

Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do;'

Sith I have cause and will and strength and means

To do't. Examples gross as earth exhort me:

Witness this army of such mass and charge

Led by a delicate and tender prince,

Whose spirit with divine ambition puff'd

Makes mouths at the invisible event,

Exposing what is mortal and unsure

To all that fortune, death and danger dare,

Even for an egg-shell. Rightly to be great

Is not to stir without great argument,

But greatly to find quarrel in a straw

When honour's at the stake. How stand I then,

That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,

**Excitements of my reason and my blood,
And let all sleep? while, to my shame, I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
That, for a fantasy and trick of fame,
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
Which is not tomb enough and continent
To hide the slain? O, from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!**

Hamlet questions why he has delayed, and the nature of man and honour. He resolves again to do the bloody deed. Once again, he is not really alone; he has told Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to move away but they are still on stage, following their orders to watch him.

Despite exhortation and exclamation at the end, this speech excites Hamlet's blood for no longer than the previous soliloquies. Though it seems to deprecate passive forbearance and endorse the nobility of action — by definition one cannot be great if one merely refrains — the negative diction of 'puffed', 'eggshell',

‘straw’, ‘fantasy’ and ‘trick’ work against the meaning so that it seems ridiculous of Fortinbras to be losing so much to gain so little, and neither Hamlet nor the audience can be persuaded of the alleged honour to be gained. Fortinbras — who is not really a ‘delicate and tender prince’ but a ruthless and militaristic one, leader of a ‘list of lawless resolute’ (I.1.98)

— seems positively irresponsible in his willingness to sacrifice 20,000 men for a tiny patch of ground and a personal reputation. Critics dispute whether Hamlet is condemning himself and admiring Fortinbras, having accepted that the way to achieve greatness is to fight and win, like his father, or whether he has now realised how ridiculous the quest for honour is, and that one should wait for it to come rather than seek it out. As the Arden editors point out, there is double-think going on, whereby ‘Hamlet insists on admiring Fortinbras while at the same time acknowledging the absurdity of his actions’ (p. 371). As so often when Hamlet is debating with himself and playing his own devil’s advocate, the opposite meaning seems to defeat the conscious argument he is trying to present. Lines 53 to 56 are grammatically obscure and add to the confusion. What is clear is Hamlet’s frustration with himself at the beginning of the soliloquy, which the 26 monosyllables comprising lines 43–46 powerfully convey.

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