



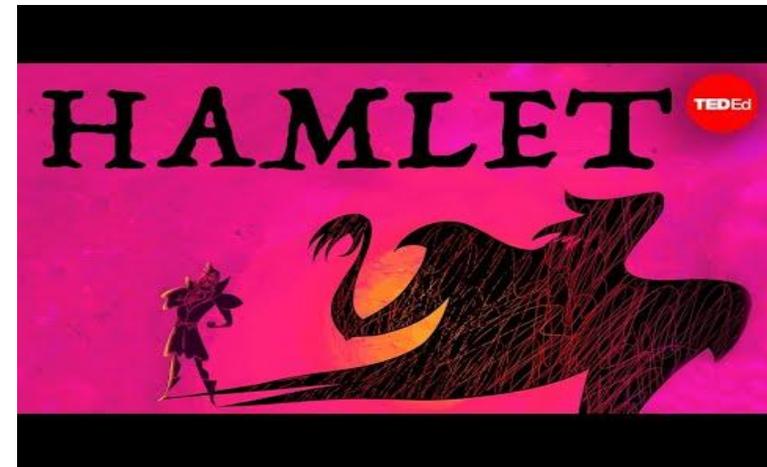
Shakespeare: *Hamlet*

https://www.ted.com/talks/iseult_gillespie_why_should_you_read_hamlet?language=en#t-810

THE NORTON
ANTHOLOGY
WORLD
LITERATURE

VOLUME C

FOURTH EDITION



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Class Outline:

Prayer: *Oh God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come ...*

Attendance-

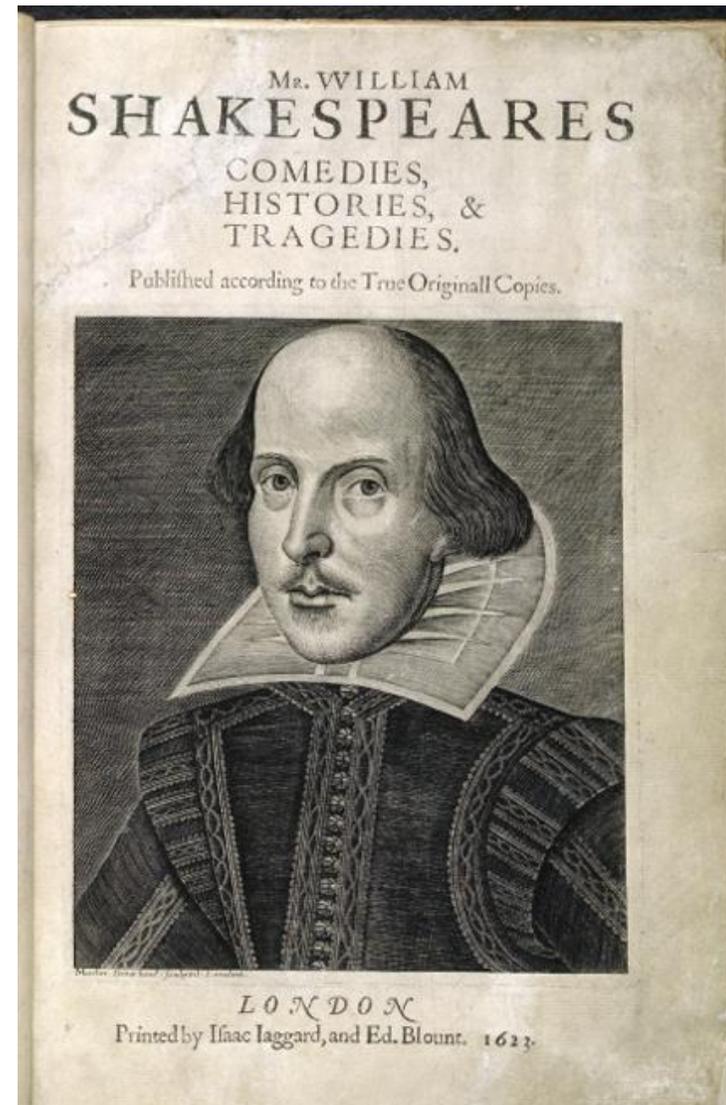
Lecture: Shakespeare's Hamlet

Class Assignment – See discussion Questions on the PPT.

Conclusion

Shakespeare (1564–1616)

- Stratford-upon-Avon
- Anne Hathaway
- London, 1592
- Lord Chamberlain



Shakespeare (1564–1616)

- William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon and raised in a middle-class family. He married Anne Hathaway when he was eighteen. Shakespeare moved to London in 1592, becoming a shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain Company. His play *Julius Caesar* was one of the first plays performed at the new Globe, and *Hamlet* was written for performance there as well.

The Globe Theater

- James Burbage
- civic legislation
- relocation
- blending social classes
- cost for entrance
- theatre interior
- costumes



The Globe Theater

- James Burbage, the actor-owner of Shakespeare's troupe, faced opposition from puritanical city officials who sought to close theaters. He escaped civic legislation against theatrical performances by moving his playhouse across the Thames River and constructing the Globe. The Globe was open to all classes: Anyone who wished to enter could pay a penny, and this heterogeneous mix is reflected in Shakespeare's plays. The Globe used almost no scenery and few stage props but utilized lavish costumes.

Background

“Now Hamlet, hear: / 'Tis given out that,
sleeping in my orchard, / A serpent stung me;
so the whole ear of Denmark / Is by a forgèd
process of my death / Rankly abused: but
know, thou noble youth, / The serpent that did
sting thy father's life / Now wears his crown”
(1.5.34–40).

Background

- Based on a medieval Scandinavian legend, Hamlet brings the figure of the hero who feigns madness into the Renaissance court. There is a ruler holding power, and much of the action is related to questions concerning the nature of that power. The sense of outside dangers and internal disruption everywhere frames the personal story of Hamlet, and reflects the tempestuous politics underlying Elizabeth's reign.

Ophelia

“Her clothes spread wide, / And mermaid-like a while they bore her up: / Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes, / As one incapable of her own distress, / Or like a creature native and indued / Unto that element: but long it could not be / Till that her garments, heavy with their drink, / Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay / To muddy death” (4.7.175–83).



Ophelia

- Courtship and love are reduced to Hamlet's mockery of Ophelia, who is a contrast to Hamlet's mother, Gertrude. In the "Nunnery Scene," Hamlet recites his "to be or not to be" soliloquy, approaches Ophelia, and orders her to a nunnery. Ophelia suffers from a nervous breakdown after her father's death and becomes increasingly delusional. Her death (questioned as suicide or unfortunate accident) and funeral raise issues of incestuous desire, both of Ophelia for her father and of Laertes for his sister.

Yorick

“Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio: a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy: he hath borne me on his back a thousand times; and now how abhorred in my imagination it is!”
(5.1.160–63).



Yorick

- When Hamlet discovers the remains of Yorick, a man of “infinite jest” from his childhood, the prince reflects on the passing of time and the mortality of human life (5.1.160–63). This humorous, ultimately poignant scene is followed by the theatrics of Ophelia’s burial and the challenge of a competition with swords between Laertes and Hamlet.

To Be or Not To be ... View Film CLip

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vf2TpWsPvgl>

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

- Form: Play
- Genre: Tragedy
- Country of Origin: England
- Key Themes: Family, Honor and Shame, Desire, Treachery, Tyranny
- Summary: After learning that his father was murdered by his new step- father and uncle, Hamlet tries to avenge his father's death. Meanwhile, the kingdom is crumbling due to Claudius's inability to reign. By the end of the play, tragedy reigns inside the castle while outside the castle Denmark falls.

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

- Key Passages
 - Hamlet: “To be, or not to be . . .”
 - Hamlet: “The play’s the thing / Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king.”

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

I. **The ghost of King Hamlet incites the action.** “Stand and unfold yourself,” demands Francisco in the second line. The ghostly presence is a sign that “something is rotten in the state of Denmark,” but exactly what? The ghost does not respond to any of the men in the opening scene, but Horatio reasons that it will speak to Prince Hamlet. Indeed, the ghost lures Hamlet later in act 1 to a private scene in which he informs him of his father’s violent murder at the hands of his uncle Claudius.

The ghost demands that Hamlet remember him and avenge his father’s death. Hamlet agrees but does not act immediately because he doubts the validity of the ghost’s claims and seeks empirical evidence against his uncle. At the end of act 2, he reasons: “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” (2.2.553– 58).

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

- In search of proof, Hamlet instructs Horatio to observe Claudius during the performance of a play that somewhat reenacts the murder of Hamlet and thereby to “catch the conscience of the king” (2.2.560). This tactic proves successful, but a visit to his mother’s bedroom almost sidetracks his bloody revenge. In the midst of his argument with Gertrude, the ghost appears to him again to remind him of his almost “blunted purpose” (3.4.111).
- While the ghost appears but does not speak to all of Hamlet’s friends at the start of the play, in the ghost’s final appearance it is present to Hamlet alone. Gertrude neither sees it nor hears it. Thus the scene (3.4) confirms Hamlet’s madness from her point of view but strengthens his own resolve for bloody revenge, which continues unabated until the end of the play.

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

II. Gertrude's hasty marriage to her late husband's brother, Claudius, disturbs Hamlet. Before Hamlet even learns of his father's murder, the timing of the wedding on the heels of the funeral upsets him. "I came to see your father's funeral," says Horatio, a friend from school at Wittenberg. "I think it was to see my mother's wedding," Hamlet quips in response (1.2.176, 178). His first soliloquy in the play ("O that this too too sullied flesh would melt" [1.2.129–59]) laments the passing of his father, certainly, but it draws ire from the fact that his mother, who seemed to love his father dearly, quickly thereafter married his brother, Hamlet's uncle. "O most wicked speed, to post / With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!" (1.2.156–57).

Hamlet loved his father and cannot understand how his mother could so quickly marry another man who, at least to him, is much less a man. Beyond an unbalanced comparison between two brothers, however, Hamlet later accosts his mother for what he deems to be loose sexuality and tells her that she, who once hung upon the neck of her former husband, is too old for love.

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

- He accuses her of living in the “rank sweat of an enseamed bed” (3.4.93) and leaves her with the final injunction: “Go not to my uncle’s bed. / Assume a virtue, if you have it not” (3.4.159–60). For Hamlet, then, the two events, the death of his father and the subsequent marriage of his mother to his uncle, are almost interchangeable and simultaneous.
- Initially, in his first soliloquy, he says that his father had been dead two months, but he then amends that statement to something less (“not so much, not two” [1.2.138]). In the same speech a few lines later, near the end, he claims that Gertrude remarried within a month. Later, to Ophelia, he remarks that his mother remarried within two hours of his father’s death. The ghost’s report of his father’s murder at the hands of Claudius leads Hamlet to revenge, but the fact of his mother’s remarriage to Claudius had already put dark and bloody thoughts into his head.

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

III. Hamlet tries to reconcile outward appearance and stated resolve with inner feeling and decisive action. Initially, in mourning his father's death, Hamlet appears dressed entirely in black and plays the part of a grieving son. He is aware that his outward behavior is both excessive and conventional but claims that he has "that within which passeth show; / These but the trappings and the suits of woe" (1.2.85–86).

The depth and intensity of his inner feelings, he suggests, cannot receive adequate representation on the surface of appearance. This crisis of identity haunts Hamlet throughout the play. The player, for example,

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Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

...tears a passion to tatters when he performs a written scene from antiquity. “What’s Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba?” Hamlet soliloquizes about the nature of acting and the phenomenon of creating an emotional display over nothing, remote events in which one has no vested personal interest (2.2.500).

He lambastes himself because, in contrast, he has every reason to carry out his revenge, suffering the real death of his father, but he can do nothing yet.

Beyond the player, though, Hamlet also sees a resemblance of his cause in Laertes, whose father has also been murdered. Unlike Hamlet, Laertes returns from France willing and eager to avenge his father’s death immediately. Hamlet envies Laertes’s conviction and readiness for action, but, ironically, Laertes’s impetuous desire for vengeance allows Claudius to use him as a foil for his own devious purposes. *The model for action seems to be Fortinbras, the son of the Norwegian king, who has marched across Denmark to defeat a Polish army and arrives at Elsinore at the end to take the crown.*

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

IV. Revenge demands both good timing and certain proof. After seeing Claudius's guilty reaction to the play, Hamlet catches him alone soon thereafter and prepares to kill him (3.3). Drawing out his sword, though, he realizes that Claudius is kneeling to recite his prayers, thus Hamlet aborts his revenge for the moment. He is afraid that if he kills Claudius during prayer, the king's soul will travel straight to heaven.

Hamlet fears that he will actually reward Claudius by killing him. In contrast, Hamlet's father, according to the ghost in act 1, died without atonement: "Cut off even in the blossom of my sin, / Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled, / No reck'ning made, but sent to my account / With all my imperfections on my head" (1.5.76–79).

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

Likewise, Hamlet vows to kill Claudius during some act that “has no relish of salvation in ’t” (3.3.93) in order to send him to hell: drinking, gambling, swearing. Recollecting his lament from the start against his mother, he hopes to catch his uncle in the “incestuous pleasure of his bed” (3.3.91).

With better timing and a little luck, then, Hamlet would have gotten his revenge at the ghost of his father’s behest in the third act and little more than halfway through the play. Ironically, Hamlet could have carried out his impulsive desires against Claudius with impunity when he first stumbled upon him when he was reciting his prayers.

Filled with guilt, Claudius confesses after Hamlet departs for his mother’s chamber: “My words y up, my thoughts remain below: / Words without thoughts never to heaven go” (3.3.98–99).

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

V. Hamlet impulsively kills Polonius in an act of madness. In order to stall for time to effect his revenge, Hamlet puts on a seeming “antic disposition” (1.5.170) to mask his true thoughts and inclinations. Polonius advises the king that the prince is madly in love with Ophelia, Polonius’s daughter, although Claudius always suspects that Hamlet’s madness has its roots in another cause. Indeed, Hamlet feigns madness in order to find the right moment to carry out his plot against Claudius. After failing to kill his uncle in the scene described earlier (3.3), Hamlet moves on to his mother’s bedroom, where he violently confronts her about her behavior.

- Thinking that the sound he hears in her room might be coming from his uncle, although he did just see him in another part of the castle, he thrusts his sword through the arras and unwittingly kills Polonius, who has been spying on him. Hamlet expresses little remorse over this killing initially, even though Polonius might have become his father-in-law and even though his rash action leads directly to Ophelia’s breakdown and insanity.

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

- This reaction raises the question, is Hamlet really mad? Has the madness he once adopted as a role to play become his reality? After all, now he is the only one who can see and hear the ghost. What is more, his feigned behavior is indistinguishable from the true madness displayed in the following scenes by Ophelia. The intensity of his mad “performance” takes over and does not subside until he travels to England and later returns to announce himself as “I / Hamlet the Dane” (5.1.228–29), jumping into Ophelia’s grave alongside her brother, Laertes, to proclaim his love and devotion to her.
- Apologizing to Laertes later, Hamlet distances himself from his madness by reasoning that his identity and his madness are two separate entities, brought about by his thus far failed revenge against Claudius. Referring to his accidental killing of Polonius, Hamlet indicates Claudius as the missed target when he admits, “That I have shot mine arrow o’er the house / and hurt my brother” (5.2.213–14). With the final goal of his revenge in sight, that madness of Hamlet also subsides.

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

VI. The clown in the gravedigger scene humorously presents the certainty, equanimity, and naturalness of death. From the beginning, Claudius and Gertrude question Hamlet's belabored mourning of his father's death, and both point out that everyone loses a father, and that even "your father lost a father" (1.2.89).

At the other end of the play, the gravediggers offer none of the solemnity of the royal crowd that will soon come bearing Ophelia for her funeral. Instead, they joke and knock about the skulls and bones of former courtiers and commoners alike.

When Hamlet discovers the remains of Yorick, a man of "infinite jest" (5.1.161) from his childhood, the prince reflects on the passing of time and the mortality of human life (5.1.180–81).

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

- This humorous, ultimately poignant scene is followed by the theatrics of Ophelia's burial and the challenge of a competition with swords between Laertes and Hamlet. Tonally, the play undergoes a radical shift at this point to quiet contemplation and expectation.
- Horatio warns his friend that the contest might be a trap, but Hamlet responds: "If it [death] be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come; the readiness is all; since no man has aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes?" (5.2.192–94).
- Acknowledging the limits and inevitability of his own mortality, Hamlet relaxes going forward, and, although he also dies, he exacts his revenge against his uncle.

Think About It ... *

- Shakespeare raises the question of honorable and ethical death versus suicide by madness or by mandate throughout the play.
- *Do you believe that Ophelia's death is accidental? Are the parents of both Hamlet and Ophelia to blame for their children's melancholia and erratic behavior?*

Suicide

“O, I die, Horatio; / The
potent poison quite
o’er-crows my spirit: / I
cannot live to hear the news
from England; / But I do
prophesy the election lights /
On Fortinbras: he has my
dying voice; / So tell him,
with the occurrents, more
and less, / Which have
solicited. The rest is silence”
(5.2.322–28).

Literary Elements

- Aristotelian terms of tragedy defied
- stichomythia: alternating lines, shared between alternating characters in dispute
- stichomythia, asyndeton: “...to die, to sleep; / To sleep: perchance to dream” (3.1.64–65)
- double entendre: nunnery = brothel
- aside: character directly addresses the audience

Literary Elements

Shakespeare abandons many of the requirements for tragedy, outlined by Aristotle: Good tragedy, Aristotle argued, imitates real, serious, and completed action; uses stylized language; induces catharsis (the outpouring of pity and fear) in the audience; and mixes metrical speech and song. The six elements of tragedy are divided into the form (media), the manner of presentation, and the objects of imitation; Aristotle considers plot—the organization of events—to be the most critical element of tragedy.

Literary Elements

Plots should be non-episodic and follow the structure of recognition (a character realizes his predicament), catharsis (the character and audience are inspired to fear and pity), and reversal (the change in plot line to achieve stasis at the play's end).

Tragic plays should have unhappy endings, characters should behave and experience what is probable and inevitable, and the gods should not be relied on to resolve events that are central to the play's action (only preceding or subsequent actions) as divine intervention is unreasonable.

Literary Elements

Chorus is not an arbitrary character in the tragedy, but (in emulation of earlier times, when the Chorus played a role in the religious rites from which tragedy evolved) should play an integral role in the performance.

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Think About It

Hamlet loved his father and cannot understand how his mother could so quickly marry another man who, at least to him, is much less a man.

Beyond an unbalanced comparison between two brothers, however, Hamlet later accosts his mother for her loose sexuality and tells her that she, who once hung upon the neck of her former husband, is too old for love.

Think About It

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Think About It

Consider the idea of the supernatural in the play, and how that would be presented in a world without religion—as a sign of mental illness or unexplained physics?

Think About It

The ghost demands that Hamlet remember him and avenge his father's death. Hamlet agrees but does not act immediately because he doubts the validity of the ghost's claims and seeks empirical evidence against his uncle. At the end of Act 2, he reasons: "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" (2.2.553–58).

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Gertrude neither sees it nor hears it. Thus the scene (3.4) confirms Hamlet's madness from her point of view but strengthens his own resolve for bloody revenge, which continues unabated until the end of the play.

Response Questions 1

Does Hamlet come from a functional family?
How do modern viewers respond to Hamlet's mother remarrying (her husband's brother) shortly after being widowed?

Response Question 2

Discuss the place of religion with the play's dramatic action. Would the play make sense in an atheistic society?

Class Assignment & Concluding Thoughts:

Please **select one of the two** Response Questions listed and respond to in at least a page. Reminder: Each class assignment is assessed similar to a quiz grade; out of ten points.

Extra Credit: Attend one of the symposium workshops and respond to the topic presented.

Please identify the workshop attended, the presenter and include a summary of the workshop before you begin your response.

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