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COURSE WORK

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE AS AN OUTSTANDING POET OF THE ENGLISH
LITERATURE**

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays the government pays great attention to learn foreign literature. Learning and reading foreign literature helps young people to enlarge world outlook, improve critical thinking and deepen their knowledge. Masterpieces of great writers and novelists contain a lot of information about historical events, people's life of the past, their problems and hardships. By reading world literature a person gains experience and insight into people's behavior and understanding awareness of existing reality.

Nowadays the demand for learning foreign languages is strengthened. The best way of learning the certain language easily is to read that country's literature. By reading the literature we are informed not only the linguistic system of specific language but also the culture, traditions, specificities and even the history of that country. So there is one saying that "The literature is the mirror of the life". As a piece of literature the American literature impacted on developing the world literature and it brought up the great personalities like Villiam Shekspear

The theme of the course paper is as the following

The topicality of our research is that we can indicate several reasons why we selected this topic. First of all, the literature can open any ways to understand not only the language itself but also the culture, traditions, history and every side of background of the country which we are learning. Secondly, as a future philologist it will be very helpful in our future researches. **The aim** of the work is to analyze the novel and to inform about self-education and self –development in it.

The object of the course paper is The image of Hamlet at Elsinora

The structure of the work is organized as that it is divided into three parts: **Introduction** which informs about the work's aim, topic, the subject, the object and its structure; main part is divided into 2 chapters which are arranged into 2 subgroups in contemporary time. **Chapter I** gives general information about the period of post war literature; The life and works of Villiam Shekspear. **Chapter II** deals with the information on different views of combat experiences; analyses by the novel and success of the writer. In **conclusion** we inform about our final thoughts, and future plans after

the work. In the last part, in bibliography the list of the used resources and materials are given.

Few plays have a history as long and rich as Shakespeare's Hamlet. The story of a court in crisis, a young man at a crossroads, ghosts, swordplay, betrayal and madness, it has captured the interest of audiences for more than 400 years. This dynamic classic is as famous as a play can be, and yet each encounter with it can reveal something new. We hope the activities in this guide will help you as you experience this complex and profound work, whether for the first time or the hundredth. Note from the Artistic Director: I'm delighted to welcome you to Hamlet, the final play of McCarter's 2004-05 season. Many of us come to Shakespeare's plays, and to Hamlet in particular, with decades of theatrical tradition associated with them. How many times have we heard Hamlet's famous soliloquies pedantically intoned, or seen Elsinore conjured up through looming battlements and royal robes? Daniel Fish's vision of Hamlet, on the other hand, excites me because he invites us to look at the play as if it were brand new. With a company of eight actors—whose double-casting is a means of storytelling—and a nearly bare stage, he strips the play down so that artists and audiences can hear and see it in a new way. The opportunity to experience Hamlet in this intimate and spontaneous way will, I hope, allow us all an invigorating interior view of this endlessly fascinating play.

CHAPTER I. SOME FACTS ABOUT WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

1.1 Shakespeare's work and his early life.

William Shakespeare (26 April 1564 (baptised) – 23 April 1616) was an English poet, playwright, and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. He is often called England's national poet, and the "Bard of Avon". His extant works, including collaborations, consist of approximately 38 plays, 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems, and a few other verses, some of uncertain authorship. His plays have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright. Shakespeare was born and brought up in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire. At the age of 18, he married Anne Hathaway, with whom he had three children: Susanna, and twins Hamnet and Judith. Sometime between 1585 and 1592, he began a successful career in London as an actor, writer, and part-owner of a playing company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, later known as the King's Men. He appears to have retired to Stratford around 1613, at age 49, where he died three years later. Few records of Shakespeare's private life survive, which has stimulated considerable speculation about such matters as his physical appearance, sexuality, and religious beliefs, and whether the works attributed to him were written by others. Shakespeare produced most of his known work between 1589 and 1613. His early plays were primarily comedies and histories, and these are regarded as some of the best work ever produced in these genres. He then wrote mainly tragedies until about 1608, including *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, considered some of the finest works in the English language. In his last phase, he wrote tragicomedies, also known as romances, and collaborated with other playwrights. Many of his plays were published in editions of varying quality and accuracy during his lifetime. In 1623, however, John Heminges and Henry Condell, two friends and fellow actors of Shakespeare, published a more definitive text known as the post¹

¹ Bakoyeva M., E. Muratova. English Literature. – Tashkent, 2006 p 220

humous collected edition of his dramatic works that included all but two of the plays now recognised as Shakespeare's. It was prefaced with a poem by Ben Jonson, in which Shakespeare is hailed, presciently, as "not of an age, but for all time". In the 20th and 21st centuries, his works have been repeatedly adapted and rediscovered by new movements in scholarship and performance. His plays remain highly popular, and are constantly studied, performed, and reinterpreted in diverse cultural and political contexts throughout the world. In 2016, the 400th anniversary of the playwright's death, celebrations will commence in the United Kingdom and across the world to honour Shakespeare and his work. William Shakespeare was the son of John Shakespeare, an alderman and a successful glover originally from Snitterfield, and Mary Arden, the daughter of an affluent landowning farmer. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon and baptised there on 26 April 1564. His actual date of birth remains unknown, but is traditionally observed on 23 April, Saint George's Day. This date, which can be traced back to an 18th-century scholar's mistake, has proved appealing to biographers, since Shakespeare died on 23 April 1616. He was the third child of eight and the eldest surviving son. Although no attendance records for the period survive, most biographers agree that Shakespeare was probably educated at the King's New School in Stratford, a free school chartered in 1553, about a quarter-mile (400 m) from his home. Grammar schools varied in quality during the Elizabethan era, but grammar school curricula were largely similar: the basic Latin text was standardised by royal decree, and the school would have provided an intensive education in grammar based upon Latin classical authors. At the age of 18, Shakespeare married 26-year-old Anne Hathaway. The consistory court of the Diocese of Worcester issued a marriage licence on 27 November 1582. The next day, two of Hathaway's neighbours posted bonds guaranteeing that no lawful claims impeded the marriage. The ceremony may have been arranged in some haste, since the Worcester chancellor allowed the marriage banns to be read once instead of the usual three times, and six months after the marriage Anne gave birth to a daughter, Susanna, baptised 26 May 1583. Twins, son Hamnet and daughter Judith, followed almost two years later and were baptised 2 February 1585. Hamnet died of unknown causes at the age of 11 and was buried 11 August 1596. Shakespeare's coat of

arms, as it appears on the rough draft of the application to grant a coat-of-arms to John Shakespeare. It features a spear as a pun on the family name.

After the birth of the twins, Shakespeare left few historical traces until he is mentioned as part of the London theatre scene in 1592. The exception is the appearance of his name in the "complaints bill" of a law case before the Queen's Bench court at Westminster dated Michaelmas Term 1588 and 9 October 1589. Scholars refer to the years between 1585 and 1592 as Shakespeare's "lost years". Biographers attempting to account for this period have reported many apocryphal stories. Nicholas Rowe, Shakespeare's first biographer, recounted a Stratford legend that Shakespeare fled the town for London to escape prosecution for deer poaching in the estate of local squire Thomas Lucy. Shakespeare is also supposed to have taken his revenge on Lucy by writing a scurrilous ballad about him. Another 18th-century story has Shakespeare starting his theatrical career minding the horses of theatre patrons in London. John Aubrey reported that Shakespeare had been a country schoolmaster. Some 20th-century scholars have suggested that Shakespeare may have been employed as a schoolmaster by Alexander Hoghton of Lancashire, a Catholic landowner who named a certain "William Shakeshafte" in his will. Little evidence substantiates such stories other than hearsay collected after his death, and Shakeshafte was a common name in the Lancashire area. It is not known definitively when Shakespeare began writing, but contemporary allusions and records of performances show that several of his plays were on the London stage by 1592. By then, he was sufficiently known in London to be attacked in print by the playwright Robert Greene in his *Groats-Worth of Wit*: there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tiger's heart wrapped in a Player's hide*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being an absolute *Johannes factotum*, is in his own conceit the only Shakespeare in a country. Scholars differ on the exact meaning of Greene's words, but most agree that Greene is accusing Shakespeare of reaching above his rank in trying to match such university-educated writers as Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Nashe and Greene himself (the so-called "university wits"). The italicised phrase parodying the line "Oh,

²tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide" from Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part 3*, along with the pun "Shake-scene", clearly identify Shakespeare as Greene's target. As used here, *Johannes Factotum* ("Jack of all trades") refers to a second-rate tinkerer with the work of others, rather than the more common "universal genius". Greene's attack is the earliest surviving mention of Shakespeare's work in the theatre. Biographers suggest that his career may have begun any time from the mid-1580s, to just before Greene's remarks. After 1594, Shakespeare's plays were performed only by the Lord Chamberlain's Men, a company owned by a group of players, including Shakespeare, that soon became the leading playing company in London. After the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, the company was awarded a royal patent by the new King James I, and changed its name to the King's Men. In 1599, a partnership of members of the company built their own theatre on the south bank of the River Thames, which they named the Globe. In 1608, the partnership also took over the Blackfriars indoor theatre. Extant records of Shakespeare's property purchases and investments indicate that his association with the company made him a wealthy man, and in 1597 he bought the second-largest house in Stratford, New Place, and in 1605, invested in a share of the parish tithes in Stratford. Some of Shakespeare's plays were published in quarto editions beginning in 1594, and by 1598, his name had become a selling point and began to appear on the title pages. Shakespeare continued to act in his own and other plays after his success as a playwright. The 1616 edition of Ben Jonson's *Works* names him on the cast lists for *Every Man in His Humour* (1598) and *Sejanus His Fall* (1603). The absence of his name from the 1605 cast list for Jonson's *Volpone* is taken by some scholars as a sign that his acting career was nearing its end. The First Folio of 1623, however, lists Shakespeare as one of "the Principal Actors in all these Plays", some of which were first staged after *Volpone*, although we cannot know for certain which roles he played. In 1610, John Davies of Hereford wrote that "good Will" played "kingly" roles. In 1709, Rowe passed down a tradition that Shakespeare played the ghost of Hamlet's father. Later traditions maintain that he also played Adam in *As You Like It*,

² 1 Baranovskiy L.S., Kozikis D.D. "Panorama of Great Britain". Historical Outline. Minsk: Vysheishaya Shkola Publishers, 1990. – 215p.

and the Chorus in *Henry V*, though scholars doubt the sources of that information. Throughout his career, Shakespeare divided his time between London and Stratford. In 1596, the year before he bought New Place as his family home in Stratford, Shakespeare was living in the parish of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, north of the River Thames. He moved across the river to Southwark by 1599, the same year his company constructed the Globe Theatre there. By 1604, he had moved north of the river again, to an area north of St Paul's Cathedral with many fine houses. There he rented rooms from a French Huguenot named Christopher Mountjoy, a maker of ladies' wigs and other headgear.

1.2 Later years and death

Rowe was the first biographer to record the tradition, repeated by Johnson, that Shakespeare retired to Stratford "some years before his death". He was still working as an actor in London in 1608; in an answer to the sharers' petition in 1635 Cuthbert Burbage stated that after purchasing the lease of the Blackfriars Theatre in 1608 from Henry Evans, the King's Men "placed men players" there, "which were Heminges, Condell, Shakespeare, etc.". However it is perhaps relevant that the bubonic plague raged in London throughout 1609. The London public playhouses were repeatedly closed during extended outbreaks of the plague (a total of over 60 months closure between May 1603 and February 1610), which meant there was often no acting work. Retirement from all work was uncommon at that time. Shakespeare continued to visit London during the years 1611–1614. In 1612, he was called as a witness in *Bellott v. Mountjoy*, a court case concerning the marriage settlement of Mountjoy's daughter, Mary. In March 1613 he bought a gatehouse in the former Blackfriars priory; and from November 1614 he was in London for several weeks with his son-in-law, John Hall. After 1610, Shakespeare wrote fewer plays, and none are attributed to him after 1613. His last three plays were collaborations, probably with John Fletcher, who succeeded him as the house playwright of the King's Men. Shakespeare died on 23 April 1616, at the age of 52. He died within a month of signing his will, a document which he begins

by describing himself as being in "perfect health". No extant contemporary source explains how or why he died. Half a century later, John Ward, the vicar of Stratford, wrote in his notebook: "Shakespeare, Drayton and Ben Jonson had a merry meeting and, it seems, drank too hard, for Shakespeare died of a fever there contracted", not an impossible scenario, since Shakespeare knew Jonson and Drayton. Of the tributes from fellow authors, one refers to his relatively sudden death: "We wondered, Shakespeare, that thou went'st so soon/From the world's stage to the grave's tiring room." He was survived by his wife and two daughters. Susanna had married a physician, John Hall, in 1607, and Judith had married Thomas Quiney, a vintner, two months before Shakespeare's death. Shakespeare signed his last will and testament on 25 March 1616; the following day his new son-in-law, Thomas Quiney was found guilty of fathering an illegitimate son by Margaret Wheeler, who had died during childbirth. Thomas was ordered by the church court to do public penance, which would have caused much shame and embarrassment for the Shakespeare family. Shakespeare bequeathed the bulk of his large estate to his elder daughter Susanna under stipulations that she pass it down intact to "the first son of her body". The Quineys had three children, all of whom died without marrying. The Halls had one child, Elizabeth, who married twice but died without children in 1670, ending Shakespeare's direct line. Shakespeare's will scarcely mentions his wife, Anne, who was probably entitled to one third of his estate automatically. He did make a point, however, of leaving her "my second best bed", a bequest that has led to much speculation.³ Some scholars see the bequest as an insult to Anne, whereas others believe that the second-best bed would have been the matrimonial bed and therefore rich in significance. Shakespeare was buried in the chancel of the Holy Trinity Church two days after his death. The epitaph carved into the stone slab covering his grave includes a curse against moving his bones, which was carefully avoided during restoration of the church in 2008: Shakespeare's grave, next to those of Anne Shakespeare, his wife, and Thomas Nash, the husband of his granddaughter. Sometime before 1623, a funerary monument was erected in his memory on the north

³ 4 Baranovskiy L.S., Kozikis D.D. "Panorama of Great Britain". Historical Outline. Minsk: Vysheishaya Shkola Publishers, 1990. – 215p.

wall, with a half-effigy of him in the act of writing. Its plaque compares him to Nestor, Socrates, and Virgil. In 1623, in conjunction with the publication of the First Folio, the Droeshout engraving was published. Shakespeare has been commemorated in many statues and memorials around the world, including funeral monuments in Southwark Cathedral and Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

CHAPTER II. DEVELOPED TENDENCIES OF ENGLISH LITERATURE AND SHAKESPEARE PLAYS

2.1 Short plot of William Shakespeare's "Hamlet" and actions at the Elsenore

The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, often shortened to *Hamlet* (/ˈhæmlɪt/), is a tragedy written by William Shakespeare at an uncertain date between 1599 and 1602. Set in the Kingdom of Denmark, the play dramatises the revenge Prince Hamlet is called to wreak upon his uncle, Claudius, by the ghost of Hamlet's father, King Hamlet. Claudius had murdered his own brother and seized the throne, also marrying his deceased brother's widow. *Hamlet* is Shakespeare's longest play, and is ranked among the most powerful and influential tragedies in English literature, with a story capable of "seemingly endless retelling and adaptation by others". The play likely was one of Shakespeare's most popular works during his lifetime, and still ranks among his most performed, topping the performance list of the Royal Shakespeare Company and its predecessors in Stratford-upon-Avon since 1879. It has inspired many other writers – from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Charles Dickens to James Joyce and Iris Murdoch – and has been described as "the world's most filmed story after *Cinderella*".

The story of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was derived from the legend of Amleth, preserved by 13th-century chronicler Saxo Grammaticus in his *Gesta Danorum*, as subsequently retold by 16th-century scholar François de Belleforest. Shakespeare may also have drawn on an earlier (hypothetical) Elizabethan play known today as the *Ur-Hamlet*, though some scholars believe he himself wrote the *Ur-Hamlet*, later revising it to create the version of *Hamlet* we now have. He almost certainly wrote his version of the title role for his fellow actor, Richard Burbage, the leading tragedian of Shakespeare's time. In the 400 years since its inception, the role has been performed by numerous highly acclaimed actors in each successive century. Three different early versions of the play are extant: the First Quarto (Q1, 1603); the Second Quarto (Q2, 1604); and the First Folio (F1, 1623). Each version includes lines and entire scenes missing from the others. The play's structure and depth of characterisation have inspired

much critical scrutiny. One such example is the centuries-old debate about Hamlet's hesitation to kill his uncle, which some see as merely a plot device to prolong the action, but which others argue is a dramatisation of the complex philosophical and ethical issues that surround cold-blooded murder, calculated revenge, and thwarted desire. More recently, psychoanalytic critics have examined Hamlet's unconscious desires, while feminist critics have re-evaluated and attempted to rehabilitate the often maligned characters of Ophelia and Gertrude.

Act I

The protagonist of *Hamlet* is Prince Hamlet of Denmark, son of the recently deceased King Hamlet, and nephew of King Claudius, his father's brother and successor. Claudius hastily married King Hamlet's widow, Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, and took the throne for himself. Denmark has a long-standing feud with neighboring Norway, which culminated when King Hamlet slew King Fortinbras of Norway in a battle years ago. Although Denmark defeated Norway, and the Norwegian throne fell to King Fortinbras's infirm brother, Denmark fears that an invasion led by the dead Norwegian king's son, Prince Fortinbras, is imminent. On a cold night on the ramparts of Elsinore, the Danish royal castle, the sentries Bernardo and Marcellus and Hamlet's friend⁴ Horatio encounter a ghost that looks like the late King Hamlet. They vow to tell Prince Hamlet what they have witnessed.

As the Court gathers the next day, while King Claudius and Queen Gertrude discuss affairs of state with their elderly adviser Polonius, Hamlet looks on glumly. After the Court exits, Hamlet despairs of his father's death and his mother's hasty remarriage. Learning of the Ghost from Horatio, Hamlet resolves to see it himself. As Polonius's son Laertes prepares to depart for a visit to France, Polonius gives him contradictory advice that culminates in the ironic maxim "to thine own self be true". Polonius's daughter, Ophelia, admits her interest in Hamlet, but both Polonius and Laertes warn her against seeking the prince's attention. That night on the rampart, the

⁴ Chase E.M., Jewett A., Evans V. "Values in literature". – Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965. – 290p.

Ghost appears to Hamlet, telling the prince that he was murdered by Claudius and demanding that Hamlet avenge him. Hamlet agrees and the Ghost vanishes. The prince confides to Horatio and the sentries that from now on he plans to "put an antic disposition on" and forces them to swear to keep his plans for revenge secret. Privately, however, he remains uncertain of the Ghost's reliability.

Act II

Soon thereafter, Ophelia rushes to her father, telling him that Hamlet arrived at her door the prior night half-undressed and behaving crazily. Polonius blames love for Hamlet's madness and resolves to inform Claudius and Gertrude. As he enters to do so, the king and queen finish welcoming Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two student acquaintances of Hamlet, to Elsinore. The royal couple has requested that the students investigate the cause of Hamlet's mood and behavior. Additional news requires that Polonius wait to be heard: messengers from Norway inform Claudius that the King of Norway has rebuked Prince Fortinbras for attempting to re-fight his father's battles. The forces that Fortinbras conscripted to march against Denmark will instead be sent against Poland, though they will pass through a portion of Denmark to get there. Polonius tells Claudius and Gertrude his theory regarding Hamlet's behavior, and speaks to Hamlet in a hall of the castle to try to uncover more information. Hamlet feigns madness but subtly insults Polonius all the while. When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive, Hamlet greets his friends warmly, but quickly discerns that they are spies. Hamlet becomes bitter, admitting that he is upset at his situation but refusing to give the true reason why, instead commenting on "what a piece of work" humanity is. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern tell Hamlet that they have brought along a troupe of actors that they met while traveling to Elsinore. Hamlet, after welcoming the actors and dismissing his friends-turned-spies, plots to stage a play featuring a death in the style of his father's murder, thereby determining the truth of the Ghost's story, as well as Claudius's guilt or innocence, by studying Claudius's reaction.

Act III

Polonius forces Ophelia to return Hamlet's love letters and tokens of affection to the prince while he and Claudius watch from afar to evaluate Hamlet's reaction. Hamlet is walking alone in the hall as the King and Polonius await Ophelia's entrance, musing whether "to be or not to be". When Ophelia enters and tries to return Hamlet's things, Hamlet accuses her of immodesty and cries "get thee to a nunnery," though it is unclear whether this, too, is a show of madness or genuine distress. His reaction convinces Claudius that Hamlet is not mad for love. Shortly thereafter, the court assembles to watch the play Hamlet has commissioned. After seeing the Player King murdered by his rival pouring poison in his ear, Claudius abruptly rises and runs from the room: proof positive for Hamlet of his uncle's guilt. Gertrude summons Hamlet to her room to demand an explanation. Meanwhile, Claudius talks to himself about the impossibility of repenting, since he still has possession of his ill-gotten goods: his brother's crown and wife. He sinks to his knees. Hamlet, on his way to visit his mother, sneaks up behind him, but does not kill him, reasoning that killing Claudius while he is praying will send him straight to heaven while the Ghost is stuck in purgatory. In the queen's bedchamber,⁵ Hamlet and Gertrude fight bitterly. Polonius, spying on the conversation from behind a tapestry, makes a noise. Hamlet, believing it is Claudius, stabs wildly, killing Polonius, but pulls aside the curtain and sees his mistake. In a rage, Hamlet brutally insults his mother for her apparent ignorance of Claudius's villainy, but the Ghost enters and reprimands Hamlet for his inaction and harsh words. Unable to see or hear the Ghost herself, Gertrude takes Hamlet's conversation with it as further evidence of madness. After begging the queen to stop sleeping with Claudius, Hamlet leaves, dragging Polonius's corpse away. Hamlet jokes with Claudius about where he has hidden Polonius's body, and the king, fearing for his life, sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to accompany Hamlet to England with a sealed letter to the English king requesting that Hamlet be executed immediately.

⁵ Chase E.M., Jewett A., Evans V. "Values in literature". – Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965. – 290p.

Act IV

Demented by grief at Polonius's death, Ophelia wanders Elsinore. Laertes arrives back from France, enraged by his father's death and his sister's madness. Claudius convinces Laertes that Hamlet is solely responsible, but a letter soon arrives indicating that Hamlet has returned to Denmark, foiling Claudius's plan. Claudius switches tactics, proposing a fencing match between Laertes and Hamlet to settle their differences. Laertes will be given a poison-tipped foil, and Claudius will offer Hamlet poisoned wine as a congratulation if that fails. Gertrude interrupts to report that Ophelia has drowned, though it is unclear whether it was suicide or an accident exacerbated by her madness.

Act V

Horatio has received a letter from Hamlet, explaining that the prince escaped by negotiating with pirates who attempted to attack his England-bound ship, and the friends reunite offstage. Two gravediggers discuss Ophelia's apparent suicide while digging her grave. Hamlet arrives with Horatio and banter with one of the gravediggers, who unearths the skull of a jester from Hamlet's childhood, Yorick. Hamlet picks up the skull, saying "alas, poor Yorick" as he contemplates mortality. Ophelia's funeral procession approaches, led by Laertes. Hamlet and Horatio initially hide, but when Hamlet realizes that Ophelia is the one being buried, he reveals himself, proclaiming his love for her. Laertes and Hamlet fight by Ophelia's graveside, but the brawl is broken up.

Back at Elsinore, Hamlet explains to Horatio that he had discovered Claudius's letter with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's belongings and replaced it with a forged copy indicating that his former friends should be killed instead. A foppish courtier, Osric, interrupts the conversation to deliver the fencing challenge to Hamlet. Hamlet, despite Horatio's advice, accepts it. Hamlet does well at first, leading the match by two hits to none, and Gertrude raises a toast to him using the poisoned glass of wine Claudius had

set aside for Hamlet. Claudius tries to stop her, but is too late: she drinks, and Laertes realizes the plot will be revealed. Laertes slashes Hamlet with his poisoned blade. In the ensuing scuffle, they switch weapons and Hamlet wounds Laertes with his own poisoned sword. Gertrude collapses and, claiming she has been poisoned, dies. In his dying moments, Laertes reconciles with Hamlet and reveals Claudius's plan. Hamlet rushes at Claudius and kills him. As the poison takes effect, Hamlet, hearing that Fortinbras is marching through the area, names the Norwegian prince as his successor. Horatio, distraught at the thought of being the last survivor, says he will commit suicide by drinking the dregs of Gertrude's poisoned wine, but Hamlet begs him to live on and tell his story. Hamlet dies, proclaiming "the rest is silence". Fortinbras, who was ostensibly marching towards Poland with his army, arrives at the palace, along with an English ambassador bringing news of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's deaths. Horatio promises to recount the full story of what happened, and Fortinbras, seeing the entire Danish royal family dead, takes the crown for himself.

2.2 Main sources of Hamlet and his full story

Hamlet-like legends are so widely found (for example in Italy, Spain, Scandinavia, Byzantium, and Arabia) that the core "hero-as-fool" theme is possibly Indo-European in origin. Several ancient written precursors to *Hamlet* can be identified. The first is the anonymous Scandinavian *Saga of Hrolf Kraki*. In this, the murdered king has two sons—Hroar and Helgi—who spend most of the story in disguise, under false names, rather than feigning madness, in a sequence of events that differs from Shakespeare's. The second is the Roman legend of Brutus, recorded in two separate Latin works. Its hero, Lucius ("shining, light"), changes his name and persona to Brutus ("dull, stupid"), playing the role of a fool to avoid the fate of his father and brothers, and eventually slaying his family's killer, King Tarquinius. A 17th-century Nordic scholar, Torfaeus, compared the Icelandic hero Amlodi and the Spanish hero Prince Ambales (from the *Ambales Saga*) to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Similarities include the prince's

feigned madness, his accidental killing of the king's counsellor in his mother's bedroom, and the eventual slaying of his uncle.

Many of the earlier legendary elements are interwoven in the 13th-century *Vita Amlethi* ("The Life of Amleth") by Saxo Grammaticus, part of *Gesta Danorum*. Written in Latin, it reflects classical Roman concepts of virtue and heroism, and was widely available in Shakespeare's day. Significant parallels include the prince feigning madness, his mother's hasty marriage to the usurper, the prince killing a hidden spy, and the prince substituting the execution of two retainers for his own. A reasonably faithful version of Saxo's story was translated into French in 1570 by François de Belleforest, in his *Histoires tragiques*. Belleforest embellished Saxo's text substantially, almost doubling its length, and introduced the hero's melancholy.

According to one theory, Shakespeare's main source is an earlier play—now lost—known today as the *Ur-Hamlet*. Possibly written by Thomas Kyd or even William Shakespeare, the *Ur-Hamlet* would have existed by 1589, and would have incorporated a ghost. Shakespeare's company, the Chamberlain's Men, may have purchased that play and performed a version for some time, which Shakespeare reworked. Since no copy of the *Ur-Hamlet* has survived, however, it is impossible to compare its language and style⁶ with the known works of any of its putative authors. Consequently, there is no direct evidence that Kyd wrote it, nor any evidence that the play was not an early version of *Hamlet* by Shakespeare himself. This latter idea—placing *Hamlet* far earlier than the generally accepted date, with a much longer period of development—has attracted some support.

The upshot is that scholars cannot assert with any confidence how much material Shakespeare took from the *Ur-Hamlet* (if it even existed), how much from Belleforest or Saxo, and how much from other contemporary sources (such as Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*). No clear evidence exists that Shakespeare made any direct references to Saxo's version. However, elements of Belleforest's version which are not in Saxo's story

⁶ Internet.<http://www.gradesaver.com/tennysons-poems/study-guide/summary>

do appear in Shakespeare's play. Whether Shakespeare took these from Belleforest directly or through the *Ur-Hamlet* remains unclear.

Most scholars reject the idea that *Hamlet* is in any way connected with Shakespeare's only son, Hamnet Shakespeare, who died in 1596 at age eleven. Conventional wisdom holds that *Hamlet* is too obviously connected to legend, and the name Hamnet was quite popular at the time. However, Stephen Greenblatt has argued that the coincidence of the names and Shakespeare's grief for the loss of his son may lie at the heart of the tragedy. He notes that the name of Hamnet Sadler, the Stratford neighbour after whom Hamnet was named, was often written as Hamlet Sadler and that, in the loose orthography of the time, the names were virtually interchangeable. Sadler's first name is spelled "Hamlett" in Shakespeare's will.

Scholars have often speculated that *Hamlet's* Polonius might have been inspired by William Cecil (Lord Burghley)—Lord High Treasurer and chief counsellor to Queen Elizabeth I. E. K. Chambers suggested Polonius's advice to Laertes may have echoed Burghley's to his son Robert Cecil. John Dover Wilson thought it almost certain that the figure of Polonius caricatured Burghley. A. L. Rowse speculated that Polonius's tedious verbosity might have resembled Burghley's. Lilian Winstanley thought the name Corambis (in the First Quarto) did suggest Cecil and Burghley. Harold Jenkins considers the idea that Polonius might be a caricature of Burghley is a conjecture, and may be based on the similar role they each played at court, and also on the fact that Burghley addressed his *Ten Precepts* to his son, as in the play Polonius offers "precepts" to Laertes, his son. Jenkins suggests that any personal satire may be found in the name "Polonius", which might point to a Polish or Polonian connection. G. R. Hibbard hypothesised that differences in names (Corambis/Polonius:Montano/Raynoldo) between the First Quarto and other editions might reflect a desire not to offend scholars at Oxford University.

"Any dating of *Hamlet* must be tentative", cautions the *New Cambridge* editor, Phillip Edwards. The earliest date estimate relies on *Hamlet's* frequent allusions to

Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, itself dated to mid-1599. The latest date estimate is based on an entry, of 26 July 1602, in the Register of the Stationers' Company, indicating that *Hamlet* was "latelie Acted by the Lo: Chamberleyne his servantes".

In 1598, Francis Meres published his *Palladis Tamia*, a survey of English literature from Chaucer to its present day, within which twelve of Shakespeare's plays are named. *Hamlet* is not among them, suggesting that it had not yet been written. As *Hamlet* was very popular, Bernard Lott, the series editor of *New Swan*, believes it "unlikely that he [Meres] would have overlooked ... so significant a piece".

The phrase "little eyases"^[31] in the First Folio (F1) may allude to the Children of the Chapel, whose popularity in London forced the Globe company into provincial touring. This became known as the War of the Theatres, and supports a 1601 dating Katherine Duncan-Jones accepts a 1600–1 attribution for the date *Hamlet* was written, but notes that the Lord Chamberlain's Men, playing *Hamlet* in the 3000-capacity Globe, were unlikely to be put to any disadvantage by an audience of "barely one hundred" for the Children of the Chapel's equivalent play, *Antonio's Revenge*; she believes that Shakespeare, confident in the superiority of his own work, was making a playful and charitable allusion to his friend John Marston's very similar piece.⁷

A contemporary of Shakespeare's, Gabriel Harvey, wrote a marginal note in his copy of the 1598 edition of Chaucer's works, which some scholars use as dating evidence. Harvey's note says that "the wiser sort" enjoy *Hamlet*, and implies that the Earl of Essex—executed in February 1601 for rebellion—was still alive. Other scholars consider this inconclusive. Edwards, for example, concludes that the "sense of time is so confused in Harvey's note that it is really of little use in trying to date *Hamlet*". This is because the same note also refers to Spenser and Watson as if they were still alive ("our flourishing metricians"), but also mentions "Owen's new epigrams", published in 1607.

⁷ 18 Kirsch, Adam, "Matthew Arnold and Lord Tennyson", in *English Scholar*, Vol. 67, No. 3, Summer 1998. – 89p.

Three early editions of the text have survived, making attempts to establish a single "authentic" text problematic. Each is different from the others:

- First Quarto (**Q1**): In 1603 the booksellers Nicholas Ling and John Trundell published, and Valentine Simmes printed, the so-called "bad" first quarto. Q1 contains just over half of the text of the later second quarto.
- Second Quarto (**Q2**): In 1604 Nicholas Ling published, and James Roberts printed, the second quarto. Some copies are dated 1605, which may indicate a second impression; consequently, Q2 is often dated "1604/5". Q2 is the longest early edition, although it omits about 77 lines found in (most likely to avoid offending James I's queen, Anne of Denmark).
- First Folio: In 1623 Edward Blount and William and Isaac Jaggard published the First Folio, the first edition of Shakespeare's *Complete Works*.

Early editors of Shakespeare's works, beginning with Nicholas Rowe (1709) and Lewis Theobald (1733), combined material from the two earliest sources of *Hamlet* available at the time, Q2 and F1. Each text contains material that the other lacks, with many minor differences in wording: scarcely 200 lines are identical in the two. Editors have combined them in an effort to create one "inclusive" text that reflects an imagined "ideal" of Shakespeare's original. Theobald's version became standard for a long time, and his "full text" approach continues to influence editorial practice to the present day. Some contemporary scholarship, however, discounts this approach, instead considering "an authentic *Hamlet* an unrealisable ideal. ... there are *texts* of this play but no *text*". The 2006 publication by Arden Shakespeare of different *Hamlet* texts in different volumes is perhaps evidence of this shifting focus and emphasis.

Traditionally, editors of Shakespeare's plays have divided them into five acts. None of the early texts of *Hamlet*, however, were arranged this way, and the play's division into acts and scenes derives from a 1676 quarto. Modern editors generally follow this traditional division, but consider it unsatisfactory; for example, after Hamlet drags

Polonius's body out of Gertrude's bedchamber, there is an act-break after which the action appears to continue uninterrupted.

Comparison of the 'To be, or not to be' soliloquy in the first three editions of Hamlet, showing the varying quality of the text in the Bad Quarto, the Good Quarto and the First Folio

The discovery in 1823 of Q1—whose existence had been quite unsuspected—caused considerable interest and excitement, raising many questions of editorial practice and interpretation. Scholars immediately identified apparent deficiencies in Q1, which was instrumental in the development of the concept of a Shakespearean "bad quarto".^[44] Yet Q1 has value: it contains stage directions that reveal actual stage practices in a way that Q2 and F1 do not; it contains an entire scene (usually labelled 4.6)^[45] that does not appear in either Q2 or F1; and it is useful for comparison with the later editions. The scene order is more coherent, without the problems of Q2 and F1 of Hamlet seeming to resolve something in one scene and enter the next drowning in indecision. The major deficiency of Q1 is in the language: particularly noticeable in the opening lines of the famous "To be, or not to be" soliloquy: "To be, or not to be, aye there's the point. / To die, to sleep, is that all? Aye all: / No, to sleep, to dream, aye marry there it goes."

Q1 is considerably shorter than Q2 or F1 and may be a memorial reconstruction of the play as Shakespeare's company performed it, by an actor who played a minor role (most likely Marcellus). Scholars disagree whether the reconstruction was pirated or authorised. Another theory, considered by New Cambridge editor Kathleen Irace, holds that Q1 is an abridged version intended especially for travelling productions. The idea that Q1 is not riddled with error but is instead eminently fit for the stage has led to at least 28 different Q1 productions since 1881.

CHAPTER III. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE AS AN OUTSTANDING POET OF THE ENGLISH LITERATURE

3.1 Analysis and criticism

From the early 17th century, the play was famous for its ghost and vivid dramatisation of melancholy and insanity, leading to a procession of mad courtiers and ladies in Jacobean and Caroline drama. Though it remained popular with mass audiences, late 17th-century Restoration critics saw *Hamlet* as primitive and disapproved of its lack of unity and decorum. This view changed drastically in the 18th century, when critics regarded Hamlet as a hero—a pure, brilliant young man thrust into unfortunate circumstances. By the mid-18th century, however, the advent of Gothic literature brought psychological and mystical readings, returning madness and the Ghost to the forefront. Not until the late 18th century did critics and performers begin to view Hamlet as confusing and inconsistent. Before then, he was either mad, or not; either a hero, or not; with no in-betweens. These developments represented a fundamental change in literary criticism, which came to focus more on character and less on plot. By the 19th century, Romantic critics valued *Hamlet* for its internal, individual conflict reflecting the strong contemporary emphasis on internal struggles and inner character in general. Then too, critics started to focus on Hamlet's delay as a character trait, rather than a plot device. This focus on character and internal struggle continued into the 20th century, when criticism branched in several directions, discussed in context and interpretation below.

Hamlet departed from contemporary dramatic convention in several ways. For example, in Shakespeare's day, plays were usually expected to follow the advice of Aristotle in his *Poetics*: that a drama should focus on action, not character. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare reverses this so that it is through the soliloquies, not the action, that the audience learns Hamlet's motives and thoughts. The play is full of seeming discontinuities and irregularities of action, except in the "bad" quarto. At one point, as in the Gravedigger

scene, Hamlet seems resolved to kill Claudius: in the next scene, however, when⁸ Claudius appears, he is suddenly tame. Scholars still debate whether these twists are mistakes or intentional additions to add to the play's themes of confusion and duality. Finally, in a period when most plays ran for two hours or so, the full text of *Hamlet*—Shakespeare's longest play, with 4,042 lines, totalling 29,551 words—often takes over four hours to deliver. Even today the play is rarely performed in its entirety, and has only once been dramatised on film completely, in Kenneth Branagh's 1996 version. *Hamlet* also contains a favourite Shakespearean device, a play within the play, a literary device or conceit in which one story is told during the action of another story.

Compared with language in a modern newspaper, magazine or popular novel, Shakespeare's language can strike contemporary readers as complex, elaborate and at times difficult to understand. Remarkably, it still works well enough in the theatre: audiences at the reconstruction of 'Shakespeare's Globe' in London, many of whom have never been to the theatre before, let alone to a play by Shakespeare, seem to have little difficulty grasping the play's action. Much of *Hamlet's* language is courtly: elaborate, witty discourse, as recommended by Baldassare Castiglione's 1528 etiquette guide, *The Courtier*. This work specifically advises royal retainers to amuse their masters with inventive language. Osric and Polonius, especially, seem to respect this injunction. Claudius's speech is rich with rhetorical figures—as is Hamlet's and, at times, Ophelia's—while the language of Horatio, the guards, and the gravediggers is simpler. Claudius's high status is reinforced by using the royal first person plural ("we" or "us"), and anaphora mixed with metaphor to resonate with Greek political speeches.

Hamlet is the most skilled of all at rhetoric. He uses highly developed metaphors, stichomythia, and in nine memorable words deploys both anaphora and asyndeton: "to die: to sleep— / To sleep, perchance to dream". In contrast, when occasion demands, he is precise and straightforward, as when he explains his inward emotion to his mother: "But I have that within which passes show, / These but the trappings and the suits of woe". At times, he relies heavily on puns to express his true thoughts while

⁸ 18 Kirsch, Adam, "Matthew Arnold and Lord Tennyson", in *English Scholar*, Vol. 67, No. 3, Summer 1998. – 89p.

simultaneously concealing them. His "nunnery" remarks to Ophelia are an example of a cruel double meaning as *nunnery* was Elizabethan slang for *brothel*. His very first words in the play are a pun; when Claudius addresses him as "my cousin Hamlet, and my son", Hamlet says as an aside: "A little more than kin, and less than kind. An aside is a dramatic device in which a character speaks to the audience. By convention the audience realises that the character's speech is unheard by the other characters on stage. It may be addressed to the audience expressly (in character or out) or represent an unspoken thought.

An unusual rhetorical device, hendiadys, appears in several places in the play. Examples are found in Ophelia's speech at the end of the nunnery scene: "Th'*expectancy and rose* of the fair state"; "And I, of ladies most *deject and wretched*". Many scholars have found it odd that Shakespeare would, seemingly arbitrarily, use this rhetorical form throughout the play. One explanation may be that *Hamlet* was written later in Shakespeare's life, when he was adept at matching rhetorical devices to characters and the plot. Linguist George T. Wright suggests that hendiadys had been used deliberately to heighten the play's sense of duality and dislocation. Pauline Kiernan argues that Shakespeare changed English drama forever in *Hamlet* because he "showed how a character's language can often be saying several things at once, and contradictory meanings at that, to reflect fragmented thoughts and disturbed feelings". She gives the example of Hamlet's advice to Ophelia, "get thee to a nunnery", which is simultaneously a reference to a place of chastity and a slang term for a brothel, reflecting Hamlet's confused feelings about female sexuality

⁹ 18 Kirsch, Adam, "Matthew Arnold and Lord Tennyson", in *English Scholar*, Vol. 67, No. 3, Summer 1998. – 89p.

3.2 Context and interpretation

Written at a time of religious upheaval, and in the wake of the English Reformation, the play is alternately Catholic (or piously medieval) and Protestant (or consciously modern). The Ghost describes himself as being in purgatory, and as dying without last rites. This and Ophelia's burial ceremony, which is characteristically Catholic, make up most of the play's Catholic connections. Some scholars have observed that revenge tragedies come from traditionally Catholic countries, such as Spain and Italy; and they present a contradiction, since according to Catholic doctrine the strongest duty is to God and family. Hamlet's conundrum, then, is whether to avenge his father and kill Claudius, or to leave the vengeance to God, as his religion requires. Much of the play's Protestantism derives from its location in Denmark—both then and now a predominantly Protestant country, though it is unclear whether the fictional Denmark of the play is intended to mirror this fact. The play does mention Wittenberg, where Hamlet, Horatio, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern attend university, and where Martin Luther first proposed his 95 theses in 1517, effectively ushering in the Protestant Reformation. In Shakespeare's day Denmark, like the majority of Scandinavia, was Lutheran.

Hamlet is often perceived as a philosophical character, expounding ideas that are now described as relativist, existentialist, and sceptical. For example, he expresses a subjectivistic idea when he says to Rosencrantz: "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so". The idea that nothing is real except in the mind of the individual finds its roots in the Greek Sophists, who argued that since nothing can be perceived except through the senses—and since all individuals sense, and therefore perceive things differently—there is no absolute truth, but rather only relative truth. The clearest alleged instance of existentialism is in the "to be, or not to be" speech, where

Hamlet is thought by some to use "being" to allude to life and action, and "not being" to death and inaction.¹⁰

Hamlet reflects the contemporary scepticism promoted by the French Renaissance humanist Michel de Montaigne. Prior to Montaigne's time, humanists such as Pico della Mirandola had argued that man was God's greatest creation, made in God's image and able to choose his own nature, but this view was subsequently challenged in Montaigne's *Essais* of 1580. Hamlet's "What a piece of work is a man" could supposedly echo many of Montaigne's ideas, and many scholars have disagreed on whether Shakespeare drew directly from Montaigne or whether both men were simply reacting similarly to the spirit of the times.

Nevertheless, if the sentence is analysed in the textual context it is easy to understand how Hamlet was being sarcastic: "Man delights not me", he concludes. Amaral argues that this is the result of melancholy. This condition was a main subject of philosophy in this epoch. After a period of confidence in reason's ability to unveil reality (Renaissance), 'Mannerism' started questioning its power. Hamlet shows traces of this. In this sense, Hamlet is not feigning madness, but he is indeed trapped between the world everybody expects him to see (the lies told by Claudius and accepted by all, i.e. social decorum) and the world revealed to him by knowledge (the reality of the murdering, as testified by his father's ghost). This condition of being trapped between two different ways of seeing reality was also pictured by Shakespeare's contemporary Cervantes, in *Don Quixote*. This profound meditation was examined by the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer in *The World as Will and Representation*. Schopenhauer uses Hamlet to clarify his main argument. He argues that the world as we see it is a conjunction of representations. These representations are formed by the projection of our will towards the world. We can only see objects of our desires. In this sense he argues that only art could show us that reality is such a construct. Exactly as Hamlet did: "If the whole world as representation is only the visibility of the will, then art is the elucidation of this visibility, the camera obscura which shows the objects more purely,

¹⁰ 18 Kirsch, Adam, "Matthew Arnold and Lord Tennyson", in *English Scholar*, Vol. 67, No. 3, Summer 1998. – 89p.

and enables us to survey and comprehend them better. It is the play within the play, the stage on the stage in *Hamlet*." ¹¹

In his openness to embrace the ghost's message, Hamlet assuages Horatio's wonderment with the analytical assertion, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

In the first half of the 20th century, when psychoanalysis was at the height of its influence, its concepts were applied to *Hamlet*, notably by Sigmund Freud, Ernest Jones, and Jacques Lacan, and these studies influenced theatrical productions. In his *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud's analysis starts from the premise that "the play is built up on Hamlet's hesitations over fulfilling the task of revenge that is assigned to him; but its text offers no reasons or motives for these hesitations". After reviewing various literary theories, Freud concludes that Hamlet has an "Oedipal desire for his mother and the subsequent guilt preventing him from murdering the man who has done what he unconsciously wanted to do". Confronted with his repressed desires, Hamlet realises that "he himself is literally no better than the sinner whom he is to punish". Freud suggests that Hamlet's apparent "distaste for sexuality"—articulated in his "nunnery" conversation with Ophelia—accords with this interpretation. This "distaste for sexuality" has sparked theories of Hamlet being what is now referred to as a homosexual or asexual. John Barrymore's long-running 1922 performance in New York, directed by Thomas Hopkins, "broke new ground in its Freudian approach to character", in keeping with the post-World War I rebellion against everything Victorian. He had a "blunter intention" than presenting the genteel, sweet prince of 19th-century tradition, imbuing his character with virility and lust.

Beginning in 1910, with the publication of "The Oedipus-Complex as An Explanation of Hamlet's Mystery: Study in Motive," Ernest Jones—a psychoanalyst and Freud's biographer—developed Freud's ideas into a series of essays that culminated in his book

¹¹ 20 Margaret Drabble. "The Oxford Companion to English Literature". Oxford University Press Inc., New York: 2000. – 682p.

Hamlet and Oedipus (1949). Influenced by Jones's psychoanalytic approach, several productions have portrayed the "closet scene", where Hamlet confronts his mother in her private quarters, in a sexual light. In this reading, Hamlet is disgusted by his mother's "incestuous" relationship with Claudius while simultaneously fearful of killing him, as this would clear Hamlet's path to his mother's bed. Ophelia's madness after her father's death may also be read through the Freudian lens: as a reaction to the death of her hoped-for lover, her father. She is overwhelmed by having her unfulfilled love for him so abruptly terminated and drifts into the oblivion of insanity. In 1937, Tyrone Guthrie directed Laurence Olivier in a Jones-inspired *Hamlet* at The Old Vic. Olivier later used some of these same ideas in his 1948 film version of the play.

In the 1950s, Lacan's structuralist theories about *Hamlet* were first presented in a series of seminars given in Paris and later published in "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*". Lacan postulated that the human psyche is determined by structures of language and that the linguistic structures of *Hamlet* shed light on human desire. His point of departure is Freud's Oedipal theories, and the central theme of mourning that runs through *Hamlet*. In Lacan's analysis, Hamlet unconsciously assumes the role of *phallus*—the cause of his inaction—and is increasingly distanced from reality "by mourning, fantasy, narcissism and psychosis", which create holes (or lack) in the real, imaginary, and symbolic aspects of his psyche. Lacan's theories influenced literary criticism of *Hamlet* because of his alternative vision of the play and his use of semantics to explore the play's psychological landscape. In the *Bloom's Shakespeare Through the Ages* volume on Hamlet, editors Bloom and Foster express a conviction that the intentions of Shakespeare in portraying the character of Hamlet in the play exceeded the capacity of the Freudian Oedipus complex to completely encompass the extent of characteristics depicted in Hamlet throughout the tragedy: "For once, Freud regressed in attempting to fasten the Oedipus Complex upon Hamlet: it will not stick, and merely showed that Freud did better than T.S. Eliot, who preferred *Coriolanus* to *Hamlet*, or so he said. Who can believe Eliot, when he exposes his own Hamlet Complex by declaring the play to be an aesthetic failure?" The book also notes James Joyce's interpretation,

stating that he "did far better in the Library Scene of *Ulysses*, where Stephen marvelously credits Shakespeare, in this play, with universal fatherhood while accurately implying that Hamlet is fatherless, thus opening a pragmatic gap between Shakespeare and Hamlet."

Joshua Rothman has written in *The New Yorker* that "we tell the story wrong when we say that Freud used the idea of the Oedipus complex to understand *Hamlet*". Rothman suggests that "it was the other way around: *Hamlet* helped Freud understand, and perhaps even invent, psychoanalysis". He concludes, "The Oedipus complex is a misnomer. It should be called the 'Hamlet complex'."

In the essay "Hamlet Made Simple", David P. Gontar turns the tables on the psychoanalysts by suggesting that Claudius is not a symbolic father figure but actually Prince Hamlet's biological father. The hesitation in killing Claudius results from an unwillingness on Hamlet's part to slay his real father. If Hamlet is the biological son of Claudius, that explains many things. Hamlet doesn't become King of Denmark on the occasion of the King's death inasmuch as it is an open secret in court that he is Claudius's biological son, and as such he is merely a court bastard not in the line of succession. He is angry with his mother because of her long standing affair with a man Hamlet hates, and Hamlet must face the fact that he has been sired by the man he loathes. That point overturns T. S. Eliot's complaint that the play is a failure for not furnishing an "objective correlative" to account for Hamlet's rage at his mother. Gontar suggests that if the reader assumes that Hamlet is not who he seems to be, the objective correlative becomes apparent. Hamlet is suicidal in the first soliloquy not because his mother quickly remarries but because of her adulterous affair with the despised Claudius which makes Hamlet his son. Finally, the Ghost's confirmation of an alternative fatherhood for Hamlet is a fabrication that gives the Prince a motive for revenge.

Conclusion

This Act begins by establishing the atmosphere of political intrigue at Elsinore. Polonius plots to spy on Laertes by means of Reynaldo; Claudius and Gertrude plot to spy on Hamlet by means of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; Norway foils Fortinbras' plot to invade Denmark, only to assist him in a venture against Poland. It seems that everyone in Elsinore is plotting against everyone else. Significantly, though, these intrigues are represented as very clumsy, if not stupid. Polonius' instructions to Reynaldo are so comically complex and so circuitously related that he himself loses track of them at one point. And his attempt to relate his great discovery of Hamlet's broken heart to Claudius and Gertrude in the second scene does not go any better. "Brevity is the soul of wit," he says (another instance of Polonius getting one of Shakespeare's most famous and most often decontextualized lines); and he then proceeds to be anything but brief, anything but witty. Rather, he is dull, pedantic, self-important, pompous, flowery – and, more to the point, dead wrong. As in Act One, Polonius obviously fancies himself a great political mind. We might beg to differ.

Claudius, too, shows remarkable political stupidity in trusting to the espionage of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two rather clownish fellows whom Hamlet sees through instantly. Moreover, the Norway episode reveals Claudius' blunt instincts quite clearly; he appears ready to agree to allow Fortinbras, whom only days before had planned to take over his realm, to march through Denmark on his way to conquer Poland. This is sort of like allowing Canada to march through the United States in order to attack Mexico. In other words, it makes no sense at all, strategically or logistically. Claudius and Polonius, try as they might to play the part of Machiavellian lords of state, are really quite out of their depth. Hamlet, however, has found his element in Act Two. His language is dazzling, full of wild puns, inventive jokes, and succinct and strong observations – sheer mastery. His repartee with Polonius, for instance, plays brilliantly with the notion of "method in madness" (as Polonius puts it). He plays the role of the melancholic madman almost as though Polonius is a gullible audience member. Hamlet toys with Polonius, leading the old fool to think just what he wants. Rosencrantz and

Guildenstern, too, are no match for the perceptiveness of Hamlet. He instantly plumbs the depths of their purpose, calling them out for royal spies. In short, Hamlet appears in this Act as the only truly gifted politician, the only accurate reader of men's minds, in the whole of Elsinore. Why, then, is he so reluctant to act – so incapable, it seems, of action? Why does he not even mention revenge until the very last speech of the Act? It seems that Hamlet is so obsessed with contemplating the meaning of action that he is rendered unable to act himself. This is the central question of *Hamlet*, of course, and one that has frustrated and intrigued readers for centuries. The transition from the Hamlet of Act One Scene Five, so willing and eager to kill Claudius, to the Hamlet of Act Two Scene Two, where he is witty and evasive and ultimately impotent, is really quite absurd. It's almost as though we've suddenly landed in another play – one not about revenge, but about something else, about madness or politics or about the very meaning of acting.

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