

Current Forum: Hamlet

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Date: Sun Oct 19 2003 3:39 pm

Author: Sarver, Alainna <04arsarv@alma.edu>

Subject: Oh, Hamlet

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I have read this play before, as have most people. Coming to it after about 4 years, I find things different than when I read it the first time.

Here are some things I think we should discuss in class this week:

- The ghost- of course, the ghost has come back to tell Hamlet of what really happened, but can Hamlet really believe him? Wouldn't you be a little leery of trusting an apparition?
- To what extent is this a tragedy? Who exactly is the tragic hero in this play?
- It seems to me that Hamlet is just playing madness. But is there real madness deep down? What about his many soliloquies and mentions of suicide? What really makes him want to seek revenge on his uncle?
- What about Ophelia? Does Hamlet really love her? If he did, why would he put her through such torment? Does she really drown herself, or does something else happen? I think that her father's death was definitely a breaking point.
- How are the women portrayed in this play?
- What about this Fortinbras character? What is his purpose if he doesn't really appear all that much?

Well, that's it for now. See everyone in class.

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Current Forum: Hamlet

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Date: Sun Oct 19 2003 9:48 pm

Author: Hemmingson, Sara <05sahemm@alma.edu>

Subject: Method in his madness?

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I've also read Hamlet before, but coming back to it two years later I'm still coming to some of the same conclusions. And it seems to me that there is an awful lot of evidence to support the idea that Hamlet really does go insane. He comes back from school to find his father dead and his mom married to his uncle, then they won't let him return to school and he starts seeing ghosts--this would certainly be enough to put some people over the edge. His treatment of Ophelia ranges from proclaiming he hates her to fighting with Laertes at her grave over how "much he loved her." That aside, he also talks to a skull lovingly and kisses it, then suddenly throws it away in disgust. For much of the play he doesn't dare kill his uncle, yet he kills Polonius without thinking twice. Not to mention all his contemplation about suicide. I know true "believers" will defend all these, but you have to admit that there is also so evidence for a real mental condition here.

A few other issues I'd like to talk about are the role of Gertrude: is she really innocent? Why did she marry the King? And also, I believe there's some theory out there that Hamlet and Gertrude are involved in some sort of incestuous relationship. I don't think there's anything to it, but it might be worth talking about.

Um...another question. There's been some complaints about movies and performances in which Hamlet--a student!--is played by a man in his thirties. Yet when Hamlet is talking about Yorick, he says he "knew him well," yet the gravedigger says he died "three and twenty years ago." How old does that make Hamlet!?

I know there was more I wanted to say, but it's slipped my mind for the time being. Hopefully I'll remember by class tomorrow.

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Current Forum: Hamlet

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Date: Mon Oct 20 2003 1:36 am

Author: White, Heather <04hlwhit@alma.edu>

Subject: Good night sweet prince...

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Unfortunately, I think Alainna hit pretty much everything I wanted to mention in class. I think I am going to take a shot and then though.

-The ghost: I can see why Hamlet leapt to believe the ghost of his father. Hamlet is not exactly in a good mental state and this gives him some excuse to act out and feelings of torment/rage/anger he might have against his mother and uncle.

-Tragic hero: I think Hamlet is the classic tragic hero. To watch him go "mad" and fall from what he was to what he became.

-Madness: I still cannot decide if Hamlet actually goes mad or not. I've struggled with this for four years and I still do not know. I tend to think that he is pretending, but at the same time is anyone that good of an actor? What makes him want to seek revenge? His uncle married his mother even before the king's body was cold. That seems just a little shady even without the ghost's prodding.

Ophelia: I think at one point Hamlet did love Ophelia. I am not sure if his treatment of her is a result of his madness or a cover for not actually being mad. I do think she kills herself, what really does she have left. Although, perhaps it is because I am of the modern feminist mindset, but I think in many ways she is more of a tragic character than Hamlet.

Women: In many ways I think the portrayal of women in this play is a carry over from plays like Henry V. In many ways they are possessions, if not ruled by fathers then by brothers or husbands.

I still cannot quite figure out Fortenbras.

I feel bad for Gertrude. I excuse a lot of her actions on the fact that the marriage between her and the king was most likely arranged. I think she probably fell in love with Claudius--not that it was okay to get rid of the king--but that is why she married them. Incest? You're kidding right? Someone must have been really bored to think up that one.

Oh, there was a production of this done in Lansing this summer, and the director took Hamlet's "madness" from the angle that he was driven insane by syphilis. It's an interesting theory and I can see where he got it from, what does everyone else think? Does it hold up?

Can we make this movie extra credit since I don't think anyone has four hours to watch Kenneth Branagh, as Kenneth Branagh, as Hamlet?

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Current Forum: Hamlet

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Date: Mon Oct 20 2003 1:00 pm

Author: Sova, Alice <04aesova@alma.edu>

Subject: Hamlet

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So much to discuss, so little time...

Hamlet's insanity: So far everyone is questioning whether or not he really goes insane or if he is faking it. I say he's faking it. Yes, (I think it was Heather) had a point in saying he definitely had reasons to go off the deep end, but let's look at the patterns in his speeches. When he talks to those who know what's going on, like Horatio, he speaks in verse and makes sense. When he speaks to Claudius, Polonius, or anyone else he's trying to fool into thinking he's mad, he speaks in prose. Hmm... His soliloquies are in verse too. So, even though he may be contemplating suicide, he is thinking clearly. Look at the end of 3.2. Hamlet talks nonsense about clouds (in prose) with Polonius. But, as soon as Polonius and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exit, he's back in verse. This has to say something about his mindset.

Gertrude: What is this woman's role? Was she involved in the death of her husband or is her reaction to Hamlet in 3.4 enough to tell us that she is innocent and probably a victim of her own loneliness/lustfulness and Claudius' cunning ways? As for the Oedipus complex that most think of in regards to her relationship to Hamlet, I don't know what to think. Perhaps subconsciously he is jealous of his uncle/father, but I do not think he wants to "be" with his mother.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: I don't know why, but these two characters fascinated me in high school when we read this play. Somehow, they are sentenced to death (?) at the end. What about their relationship to Hamlet? Are they just school buds trying to help out a friend that everyone thinks has gone nuts? What affect do they have on the play as a whole as minor characters? (Side note: Has anyone seen Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead? Good flick!)

Ophelia: She was dumped because Hamlet was playing insane. Her father was killed by the man she loved and was dumped by. She didn't know what to feel for Hamlet anymore. So, did she commit suicide? I think so. It makes sense in her case because of her father and Hamlet, but also plot-wise. Her death gave Laertes all the more reason to kill Hamlet and gave Claudius someone else to do his evil deed.

Last question: Where did Fortinbras come from? Is he just the strong character there to provide a glimpse of hope, like Marcus in Titus? (Did I bring that up again?!!)

See you tomorrow...

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Current Forum: Hamlet

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Date: Mon Oct 20 2003 1:27 pm

Author: Ottenhoff, John <ottenhoff@alma.edu>

Subject: web resources

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A couple of sources to check out:

- "Sources of Hamlet" makes available the various versions of the play; the contrast between the 2nd Quarto and first folio versions is very instructive.
- [The Undiscovered Country](#) is a site one of my students created; it looks in great detail at the "To Be" soliloquy and, more generally, as Shakespeare on the Internet.
- [Hamlet on the Ramparts](#) is a website devoted to Hamlet's first encounter with the ghost.

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Date: Mon Oct 20 2003 6:40 pm

Author: Ryan, Colin <05cwryan@alma.edu>

Subject: Another set of things to think on

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I noticed that a lot of you are focusing on characters and interaction and motives this tie. Well, beings as that that's usually my department, I thought I'd bring something else up.

There are a lot of motifs in the play, repeating themes that you find in a lot of the lines. Some, such as revenge, are extremely obvious, others are more subtle, and yet are just as omnipresent throughout the play.

When I spent half a term on this in high school, we went through our copies and highlighted examples of these in the text. I still have the same text, so I'll have examples for class tomorrow.

Revenge: In many of the lines, you will find references to oaths and vengeance and revenge. Not only in Hamlet's lines, but in Laertes' and the king's as well.

Madness/sickness: Disease references are all over the play as well, look for them if you have the time to read the play again. This motif may have been what led to what Heather described, with Hamlet's "Madness" being brought on by syphilis. The madness lines and the disease lines are often intertwined, but they also use disease references when discussing poison.

Ears: This may sound odd, but ears are a common motif as well. Not only is the old king poisoned through his ear, but you will find other ear references as well. Example: (1.5.21-22) But this eternal blazon must not be to ears of flesh and blood.

Just something more for you to think about. As if you didn't have enough already.

-Token out

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Date: Mon Oct 20 2003 7:56 pm

Author: Wagner, Corinne <04clwagn@alma.edu>

Subject: First attempt

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So, here goes. I am going to attempt to make sense of my thoughts, even though all day my thoughts and my body have been telling me "you are sick, go back to bed."

I have never started a forum by saying this...(I don't think I have at least) so I figure it is my turn. I love this play! I love that there are ghosts in this play and potentially crazy people and revenge...all truly fascinating things to most people, but especially people who have chosen over all other things to study people and the way the mind works. I think it is also safe to say that I am truly beginning to understand the essence of Shakespeare's brilliance. Maybe it just took something in which I was interested, for me to realize, but whatever it was I see it now.

On the issue of ghosts, I think it is fabulous that Shakespeare could so effectively use the supernatural as a basis for this classic story. My research paper is going to be devoted to the issue of the supernatural in Macbeth, with which I am not very familiar yet. However, knowing how Shakespeare uses the ghosts in Hamlet makes me very interested in his use of such devices in his other plays including

Macbeth. I have not made it quite all the way through the play at this point, but I must say that this seems to be a much easier read for me than some of the others, especially the histories.

I am looking forward to some very good class discussions concerning Hamlet, including some of the following topics, lots of which will take some historical expertise...eh hem...Heather...:)

I am curious, as mentioned above, about the supernatural and its uses in Shakespeare's time. Another topic I would like to get into if we have time is the issue of royalty and insanity. It seems that there is at least one instance that I, in my pathetic knowledge of history, can remember, that being Crazy King Ludwig, who also may have had syphilis (sp?). So I guess I wonder if this was something that often happened in royal houses...if we have time, it might be interesting.

That is all I have for now...the flu says its time to end for the night. I HOPE to see you all in class tomorrow...we shall see. Have a great night!

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Date: Mon Oct 20 2003 8:15 pm

Author: Druskinis, Stephanie <05sadrus@alma.edu>

Subject: My first shot...

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This was my first time reading the whole play. I've read bits and pieces before, but never the whole thing. I have to say that I honestly LIKE this play - woo hoo! I wouldn't quite go as far as saying that I love the play, but who knows...we've still got a week of discussion to build on.

My main question with the play was...is Hamlet really insane? What took him so long to kill his uncle, when he pretty much had no problem killing off the other guy? He sure seemed crazy, but at the same time, he had a bit of a conscience, almost, if that makes sense. It just made me wonder about him as a character.

When I was reading the play, I wondered why a lot of the actual text of the play is italicized. Not a huge question, but I was just curious as to why some parts of the characters' interaction are so special as to deserve italicizing. It took me a minute or so to realize that in the footnotes, it explained that different versions of the play these parts are omitted...why? That really made me curious. What makes them to be so NOT special as to be omitted completely?

I think that everyone else has touched on what I wanted to already, so it's pointless in asking questions and making the same statements AGAIN. I'll see you all in class tomorrow, and Cori, I hope you feel better!

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Date: Mon Oct 20 2003 9:04 pm

Author: Thayer, Shannon <04sjthay@alma.edu>

Subject: gittin' better

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Hamlet seems to be pretty good so far. It reminds me of Titus...uh oh =o) Not yet finished reading it, but I think that Hamlet's "crazy" scheme is a bit odd. I have a few questions but maybe they'll be answered as I continue reading.

More soon, sorry not so many notes yet...busy busy day =o(

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Date: Mon Oct 20 2003 9:14 pm

Author: Sova, Alice <04aesova@alma.edu>

Subject: Re: My first shot...

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About the italics...

There is more than one version (quarto) of this play, as with many of them. The sections that were indented and italicized are from a quarto that happened to include those lines, where as the rest of lines were included in both quartos. These lines are set off to show the dramatic difference between the first and second quartos, instead of simply giving us the longer or the shorter version of the play. So now we get to compare!

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Date: Mon Oct 20 2003 9:42 pm

Author: Nieto, Marisa <04mpniet@alma.edu>

Subject: Hamlet

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I really enjoyed reading this playing. It was easier for me to understand and keep track of what was going on, unlike the last couple of plays that we've read. I have to agree with Corey (I hope that's how you spell your name) it was awesome to have a ghost in the play! I have always loved ghost stories, not that this is a ghost story, but it just adds mystery and questions of "Is this real!?" I think it would be incredible to encounter a real ghost, although I would probably pee in my pants and then faint. It would still be worth it though! Alright, enough about the ghost, even though he so cool! I* had a lot of questions concerning this play.

What was Queen Gertrude thinking when she married King Murderer, oh excuse me I mean Claudius, one month after he husbands death!? Was this normal?

I would guess that Claudius killed his brother because he wanted the throne. Did he also kill his brother for Gertrude? Did he have to kill his brother to get the throne? Wouldn't he have been next in line? I'm not good with the rules of royalty.

Why don't we see/read the part of the killing of the former King? I think having seen/read it would make us feel closer to the former King and his reasoning for wanting revenge. I understand, even without the scene, why he wants revenge. I just think the play would be a little bit more vivid with that scene.

This may seem like a really dumb question, but if Claudius hated his brother so much why is he, seeming to be, so nice to Hamlet? He's always referring to him as "our" son and "my" son rather than "my brother's" son or "my wife's" son. I think the fact that Claudius does this just drives the hell out of Hamlet. I think he makes it known, a few times in the play, that he is not his son and never would be Claudius's son. I think Hamlet also hates/resents his mother for marrying Claudius and that why he refers to her as "step-mother."

I can't tell if the Queen ever really feels guilty for what she has knowingly/unknowingly done to her former husband, her son, and to herself. When Hamlet confronts her with what the facts are (What a great scene! You go Hamlet!) she seems to be totally unaware that these things have been going on all around her and she had no clue.

One more aspect of the ghost. Why doesn't he want revenge on his wife?

"Against thy mother. Leave her to heaven,
And those thorns that in her bosom lodge
To prick and sting her."

Does he mean that her own guilt, once she knows the truth, will be punishment enough?

Also with the ghost, when he or it starts talking it begins as the "soul" of Hamlet's father, but suddenly begins speaking as though the ghost IS his father. If I remember correctly, the ghost continues to be his father through the rest of the play

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Current Forum: Hamlet

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Date: Tue Oct 21 2003 8:59 am

Author: Thayer, Shannon <04sjthay@alma.edu>

Subject: ok...here it is...

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After finishing the play, I've come to the conclusion that this play reminds me a lot of Titus. It reminds me of Titus because at the end of that play I laughed because everyone just seemed to be dead. Well, as for Hamlet...I read the last words and laughed, because everyone was dead! It cracks me up. Why did Shakespeare have the main characters die? When I read things like this, I wonder what Shakespeare's moral standings were. I mean, did he kill of Hamlet at the end because he felt that what Hamlet did was wrong? I wonder how Shakespeare's morals and beliefs influenced his writing. Maybe I'll look it up sometime and see what I can find on his beliefs effecting his writing, because I think it'd be interesting.

Gertrude makes me sick. On one hand, I guess she might've just been trying to keep her title as queen, or really loved the king...but gross. C'mon, your dead husbands brother? Did she feel no guilt until Hamlet reprimanded her? Another aspect is the characters' morals. Gertrude must've known of her wrong doings, but did she live with them well?

Looking at Ophelia, I wonder what kind of a person she is. I was trying to decide whether Hamlet really loved her or not throughout the play. Still undecided.

All through Hamlet, I was trying to figure out who was good and who was bad. I know that Claudius was bad and that Gertrude was no peach herself, but I'm just not sure about some of the others. For instance, Hamlet. I agree that maybe he really was mad. I thought he was who we were rooting for, but then he killed Polonius, but then he tried to reconcile with Laertes. I think he jumps back and forth between good and bad. Maybe that's why Shakespeare killed him off.

That's all I can think of right now. See you all in class =o)

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Date: Tue Oct 21 2003 11:42 am

Author: Hemmingson, Sara <05sahemm@alma.edu>

Subject: Ken again?

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Actually, if you're thinking about watching a film version of Hamlet, there are a lot of other versions out there if you're a little sick of good ol' KB. The Mel Gibson version isn't bad, and the Ethan Hawk version is, if nothing else, a very different take on the play.

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Date: Tue Oct 21 2003 11:48 am

Author: Hemmingson, Sara <05sahemm@alma.edu>

Subject: Addition to my first post

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It's nice to see everyone else debating Hamlet's insanity as well. For a long time I thought I was the only one who thought he was really crazy. Whoever made the point about the difference between his prose and his verse has a good point, but I still have a lot of difficulty treating Hamlet as a sane character.

This concept has tormented me for some time, because I can't help wondering if I really think Hamlet is insane, or if I only WANT TO BELIEVE he is out of sympathy for Ophelia. Now, if her boyfriend goes mad, is horrible to her, then kills her father, that's one thing. Hard to bear? Yes, but at least she doesn't have to take it personally. You can still feel sorry for Hamlet as well, because he's, well, mad.

But if you take the attitude that Hamlet is faking his madness, then what sort of inhuman person is he! ? If he was just teasing Ophelia, that's cruel enough. But if he really loved her...what sort of man can do the things he did to a woman he loves?!? I understand how important revenging his father is to him, but if he drives an innocent girl to suicide through actions he deliberately takes, excuse my language, but that's pretty fucking sick. And then he kills his school buddies for their affiliation with the King... All I can say is, I hope Hamlet IS insane, because if he isn't he sure isn't much of a tragic hero.

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Current Forum: Hamlet

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Date: Tue Oct 21 2003 12:07 pm

Author: Ottenhoff, John <ottenhoff@alma.edu>

Attachment: [hamlet_kiss.pdf](#) (156020 bytes)

Subject: Re: Good night sweet prince...

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About incest: As the Norton's notes indicate, sixteenth-century English people would likely have seen Claudius' marriage to his dead brother's wife as incestuous.

But performances sometimes bring out other possibilities. Lawrence Olivier suggests a very close relationship between Hamlet and his mother in his film version; they kiss passionately on several occasions. And in Tony Richardson's 1969 film version, Laertes and Ophelia share some semi-passionate moments together.

If you're interested in the issue of kissing in Hamlet, see the attached article. I published it in *Hamlet on Screen*, Shakespeare Yearbook 1997.

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Date: Tue Oct 21 2003 12:09 pm

Author: Ottenhoff, John <ottenhoff@alma.edu>

Subject: Re: Addition to my first post

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And consider this: Hamlet eventually causes the deaths of Polonius, Laertes, Ophelia, Claudius, Gertrude, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and himself. Hero or mass murderer?

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Date: Tue Oct 21 2003 12:41 pm

Author: White, Heather <04hlwhit@alma.edu>

Subject: Re: Good night sweet prince...

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Just to make things even more interesting...on the issue of Claudius marrying his dead brother's wife, this brings me back to our dear friend Henry VIII. Catherine of Aragon (wife #1 for Henry) was originally married to Henry's older brother Arthur. Well, poor Arthur died not too long after the marriage, and so of course Henry was now to become king. Henry VIII had made up his mind that the only woman he wanted for his queen was Catherine, so it took a Papal dispensation and a long and controversial debate, but Henry eventually married her. And it was the fact that she was his brother's wife that helped Henry convince parliament to grant him a divorce when he decided he would rather have Anne Boleyn (wife #2) since Catherine could not give him a son.

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Date: Tue Oct 21 2003 12:42 pm

Author: White, Heather <04hlwhit@alma.edu>

Subject: Re: Addition to my first post

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Or sociopath?

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Current Forum: Hamlet

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Date: Tue Oct 21 2003 4:13 pm

Author: Ottenhoff, John <ottenhoff@alma.edu>

Subject: Fat Hamlet

I didn't make this up. Here's an excerpt from a book by Richard Klein called "Eat Fat" referring to the article by Laura Keyes:

In Hamlet there is an often overlooked line, which appears in the mouth of Gertrude, the queen, in the last scene of the play. Hamlet is returning from dueling and as he enters, his mother observes, "He is fat and scant of breath." Laura Keyes has shown how difficult it is for modern audiences to accept the idea that Hamlet is fat, even if his name points to that fat fact. Ham-let is a ham, a porky piggy hogger of the limelight, a bad actor who can't tell the stage from reality. Once you realize that fact and start looking for fat, you quickly discover it everywhere in the play. Who can stop laughing when, in Act I, scene ii, Hamlet steps forth alone to the front of the stage and prays:

Oh, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!

It's as if he's giving eternal expression to the deathless dream of everyone who ever wanted to lose a few pounds.

A fat Hamlet is funny. Why? Because we prefer to attribute Hamlet's heroic indecision to noble motives, not to the low encumbrances of fat flesh. It's funny to think that what makes Hamlet tough to move when the going gets tough may be nothing more than the "non-executive or Lymphatic temperament" with which we stigmatize the fat--the moral consequences of their lack of breath and fatty deposits around the heart [Keyes 90]. All the talk about avenging his father's murder succumbs to the inertia of his avordupois. A fat Hamlet poses a contradiction between the mercurial fleetness of his witty reflections and the bulk of his breathless blubber.

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Date: Tue Oct 21 2003 6:45 pm**Author:** Druskinis, Stephanie <05sadrus@alma.edu>**Subject:** Re: My first shot...[Remove](#)

Thanks for the info, I wasn't aware of that :)

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Date: Tue Oct 21 2003 7:09 pm**Author:** Druskinis, Stephanie <05sadrus@alma.edu>**Subject:** Re: Fat Hamlet[Remove](#)

I have to say that I've never heard of a FAT Hamlet before! Of course, I've never really discussed Hamlet with people before today, but the idea of Hamlet being fat adds an interesting twist to things. (As did the idea of a gay Hamlet, which I won't really post on so Colin won't be traumatized.) I wonder what would change in the play if Hamlet actually WAS fat...hmmm.

I have to say that I really enjoyed the class discussion today. I think that this may have even been better than our discussion last Tuesday. (My roommate is in the classroom next door, and she said that we sure sounded like we were having a good time - that's a good thing, right?) I like how pretty much everyone participated in the discussion, and we got so many questions out in the open that I hadn't even thought of before - such as why the ghost really did exist, what the roles of women in the play were, and did Ophelia really kill herself...all of these questions really made me think, which is a good thing. Hopefully class on Thursday will be just as productive!

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Date: Tue Oct 21 2003 7:14 pm**Author:** Thayer, Shannon <04sjthay@alma.edu>**Subject:** Titus vs. Hamlet: battle of the madmen

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Call me crazy (no pun intended), but I'm kind of excited about our Thursday discussion about Titus and Hamlet. It's crazy realizing that all of the established characters are dead by the end in both plays.

I think the deal with Titus was a bit of denial, blindness, or just plain idiocy. If Titus was observant at all, he wouldn't smelled something fishy when the queen of the rebellious place up and married his king just like that. A woman who was once against their whole country is now the queen of it? (or empress, I don't remember) I think Titus closed his eyes a little on that one.

Hamlet knew there was something fishy and kept his eyes open. Keeping his eyes open lead to his revenge plots and such.

As for insanity, I'm not sure if I think Hamlet was insane or not. I'm leaning towards no partially because of the verse vs. prose thing, but also because Hamlet still had a conscience and wasn't out to be the bad guy...he just ended up that way.

Ok, that's all for now. Yay for Titus vs. Hamlet Thursday =o) I know, I'm a dork =o)

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Date: Tue Oct 21 2003 7:15 pm**Author:** Thayer, Shannon <04sjthay@alma.edu>**Subject:** Re: Fat Hamlet[Remove](#)

Can I just say that I laughed so hard when I read that. Just picturing a little plump man running around acting crazy, denying women, winning sword fights? hehehe...funny thought.

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Date: Tue Oct 21 2003 9:13 pm**Author:** Sova, Alice <04aesova@alma.edu>**Subject:** Re: Titus vs. Hamlet: battle of the madmen[Remove](#)

Something else to think of for Thursday besides dead and crazy people...

How does the play end (besides everyone dying)? In Titus, Marcus came in and gave a little hope for the future. Do we have any hope at the end of Hamlet? What about Fortinbras? Is there a reason why he only appears in a couple scenes (or is talked about) but is the one who will probably take over? Just a thought...

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Date: Tue Oct 21 2003 9:38 pm**Author:** Sova, Alice <04aesova@alma.edu>**Subject:** A murderer?[Remove](#)

I guess I sympathized with Hamlet from the start because he is the victim... right? Everyone that dies, is justifiable from his point of view. Claudius killed his father, so he should die. Gertrude married Claudius too quickly, so she should die... accidentally. Laertes and Polonius were plotting with Claudius, so they should die. Ophelia lost all the important men in her life, so she has nothing left to live for. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are a little tougher to justify.

So, if we like Hamlet and all these people have somehow crossed him, then they deserve to die, right? That would mean that if Hamlet lived and the play ended with him standing over all these dead bodies, we would be pleased, right? Or is that too gruesome, so he should die too, then we might sympathize with him like we're supposed to? The only problem is, what if we don't like Hamlet?

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Current Forum: Hamlet Read 22 times
Date: Wed Oct 22 2003 8:26 am
Author: Sarver, Alainna <04arsarv@alma.edu>
Subject: Re: Fat Hamlet [Remove](#)

I think thinking of Hamlet as fat is very funny also! It's kind of questionable though. I know we're still asking who exactly is the tragic hero in this play, but it would seem that if we are to make Hamlet one, then his being fat wouldn't make us like him like that. Yes, we would like him because he is just so hilarious, but I think it would change the entire interpretation of the play.

I think it is very amusing to think of though! [Reply](#)

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Date: Wed Oct 22 2003 8:31 am
Author: Sarver, Alainna <04arsarv@alma.edu>
Subject: Re: A murderer? [Remove](#)

I think that whether or not we like Hamlet has a lot to do with whether or not he is really insane. I think we would like to think that Hamlet is just playing the part, so that we feel more for him when Ophelia dies, when Gertrude dies, and then finally when he dies (that's a lot of dying, not as gruesome as Titus though!). That would make him the tragic hero and we would sympathize with his death. If he lived, I think that we would still feel for him, but he won't have anything left. I think we need to ask exactly who is the tragic hero in this play. [Reply](#)

Current Forum: Hamlet Read 21 times
Date: Wed Oct 22 2003 10:44 am
Author: Ottenhoff, John <ottenhoff@alma.edu>
Subject: Re: Titus vs. Hamlet: battle of the madmen [Modify](#) [Remove](#)

Madmen, maybe, but think also about the ways in which WS writes within a formula. The Revenge Play typically had a full set of conventions: a murder, whereby the duty of vengeance laid on next of kin; discovery of murderer by avenger, usually a matter of some difficulty; impediments to revenge; and, finally, a triumphant conclusion in which murderer is appropriately destroyed (it was also usual to have at least one ghost and a mad scene. Kyd's Spanish Tragedy and Marston's Antonio's Revenge more or less establish the pattern; WS's Titus and Hamlet certainly build on it. To what extent would you say that Hamlet demolishes the genre? [Reply](#)

Current Forum: Hamlet Read 16 times
Date: Wed Oct 22 2003 11:09 am
Author: Ottenhoff, John <ottenhoff@alma.edu>
Subject: Re: A murderer? [Modify](#) [Remove](#)

Or another way of thinking about it: What if we especially like Hamlet because he resists the idea that killing other people is a good

idea, even if they have sinned grievously? What if we especially like Hamlet because he's extraordinarily thoughtful, reflective about what it means to be a human, struggling with the gift (and burden) of rationality, aware of how much easier it must be to act as a beast, without contemplation? What if we especially like Hamlet because he seems to be one of the few honest and noble people in a world of corruption? What if, after all that noble reflection, Hamlet gives in to the impulse to kill?

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Current Forum: Hamlet

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Date: Thu Oct 23 2003 8:31 pm

Author: Ryan, Colin <05cwryan@alma.edu>

Subject: Re: Fat Hamlet

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I find it inconcievable that a fat Hamlet could even WIN a sword fight.

[Reply](#)

Current Forum: Hamlet

Read 17 times

Date: Thu Oct 23 2003 8:48 pm

Author: Ryan, Colin <05cwryan@alma.edu>

Subject: Hamlet is NOT gay!!!

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Thank you Stephanie, I appreciate you considering my feelings in your previous post.

As far as I'm concerned, the "gay Hamlet" argument was a ridiculous argument, and only continued as long as it did because we found it so amusing. Probably mostly due to my reaction to it. These are NOT real people as Dr. O used to often say, these are characters written on a page. The fact that there is no evidence, and indeed, no clear REASON to make Hamlet gay, suggests that it was not a part of the author's intent. I am now done discussing that.

Moving right along, I think we all brought up some great questions in class the past few days. And best of all *gasp!* we actually answered some of them. I think this play does have a lot to say about women's roles. Not anything very NICE to say, by modern standards, but it's there.

I wish we had discussed some of the things I brought up in my first post, such as the motifs in the play. We briefly touched on the whole "Revenge" motif, as EVERYONE seems to want revenge for something, and Fortinbras is the only one who comes out on top.

The first person to make a comment about Fortinbras coming out on top of Hamlet gets it in the face.

I have to say that I have NEVER interpreted Hamlet as truly insane. Some people will say that that is only looking at the surface, and exactly what the text tells us, that Hamlet is pretending to be crazy, and scheming the whole time. And yet, the further we delve, the more his actions seem very rational, almost calculated, and brings us back once again to the initial plan of Hamlet being sane the entire time. The only death for which he was intentionally responsible (that was NOT motivated by self-preservation) was the king. This, to me, is not the work of a madman or a sociopath, but of a man with a mission, and little to lose.

Token's \$0.02

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Current Forum: Hamlet

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Date: Sat Oct 25 2003 8:03 pm

Author: Hemmingson, Sara <05sahemm@alma.edu>

Subject: Re: Hamlet is NOT gay!!!

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I agree Hamlet is almost certainly not gay. But then again, look how many people posted about Hamlet being FAT. Some literary critics like to find an obscure line in the play, like the fat one, and make a whole case out of it. I'm sure someone could do the same and

suggest Hamlet is gay, like we experimented with in class. My point is, does the text truly support these ideas? No. But is it possible to form a coherent argument for them by looking to the text? Yes.

PS Nice one, Fortinbras on top, tee hee hee...

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Current Forum: Hamlet

Read 12 times

Date: Sat Oct 25 2003 8:08 pm

Author: Hemmingson, Sara <05sahemm@alma.edu>

Subject: Re: Titus vs. Hamlet: battle of the madmen

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I can see how Titus and Hamlet would both fit into that formula, and the similarities are pretty clear. But I see them both as being very different. In Hamlet, the murder takes place before the play even starts. In Titus, it takes place halfway through (that's assuming, of course, that the Murder to be Revenged are those of Titus' sons). They both have multiple murders within the play which must be revenged, such as Tamora's son and Polonius (or Ophelia, take your pick). The big difference is that in Hamlet, the original killing is done by the "bad guy," but in Titus, the murder that starts the whole mess is done at the hands of the "good guy." What does this say? And why is one of the two plays in question considered one of the best and most famous, while the other is laughed at more often than not?

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Current Forum: Hamlet

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Date: Sun Oct 26 2003 1:32 pm

Author: Nieto, Marisa <04mpniet@alma.edu>

Subject: Post Hamlet

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I felt that we still had a lot to talk about when class ended on Thursday. Oh well, that can't be helped.

I really wanted to talk more about Queen Gertrude and her actions and role in the play. For starters, why did she marry her husband's brother!? I really can't think of a reason unless Claudius threatened her or tricked her into the marriage. However, if he did anything to this effect, we as the audience wouldn't know. Would we? Another question about Gertrude is did she feel guilty for what she had done? Didn't she realize that Hamlet was so upset about his father's death and because of her marrying Claudius a month later!? I think I said I didn't think that she cared about Hamlet. I think she cared, but at the same time she seemed to aloof and didn't realize what was going on right in front of her.

I forgot to mention in my first posting how much I thought this play was a lot like Titus. The revenge aspect was very obvious in both plays, however this was played out differently in each play. I think Titus really planned his revenge with care and precision (sp?) so that his enemies knew exactly how much pain he was going through and that he had had the last laugh, so to speak. The revenge in Hamlet just seemed to happen so chaotically. He killed many people that shouldn't have been killed and some that were accidentally killed. It's like the revenge in Hamlet went full force and he couldn't control what he was doing. Which brings up the question: Was he a tragic hero or a murderer? Well, what if he had to be a murderer to be a tragic hero. Would that be ok to say? Otherwise I'm not sure what Hamlet was.

I know there's a lot more to say, but I'll let someone else post these thoughts/ideas.

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Current Forum: Hamlet

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Date: Sun Oct 26 2003 6:21 pm

Author: Sarver, Alainna <04arsarv@alma.edu>

Subject: Deep Thoughts

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Our dicussion this week, especially on Tuesday, I felt was really trying to get at what this play is all about. As Dr. Ottenhoff ended

class with on Thursday, there is so much in this play that we could keep questioning forever and ever. To me, this is one of those pieces of literature that you can never come to a final conclusion on. You always find something new that will try to change your thoughts (as shown by the fat and gay theories).

My conclusions so far on this play is that Hamlet wasn't really mad. I think that he was playing a part and Alice's theory about the prose and verse really turned me to that. This prose and verse thing made me question a lot of scenes in the play that I thought I had already figured out. I'm still questioning whether Hamlet really loved Ophelia or not.

Reading this play, in this class, really changed my view of this play and how interesting and complex it really is. After reading it in high school, I was kind of turned off from it. When I read it then, we didn't really focus into what Hamlet is really thinking. I think this is the first play, out of the others that we have read so far, that you can really see inside of a character's mind and what he is thinking. To me, along with the complexity of it, is what makes this play great.

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Current Forum: Hamlet

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Date: Sun Oct 26 2003 6:34 pm

Author: Druskinis, Stephanie <05sadrus@alma.edu>

Subject: Last thoughts...

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I think that this was possibly the play where we've had the best discussions in class. Pretty much everyone who was there participated in class, and I think that we found out a lot of new things that we wouldn't have gotten from just reading the play from the book, like the fat and gay theories.

I am the opposite of Marisa on the topic of Gertrude - I think we talked about her plenty, especially on Tuesday. We went through all of her separate possible motives for her marrying Hamlet's uncle, and although we did discuss them, we simply didn't come to a conclusion - which I think is what Shakespeare was trying to do.

I liked our discussions about all of Hamlet's different speeches. To read them as you go along in the play, you don't really get the same picture as when you go, say, directly from 3.1's "To be or not to be" speech, straight to 4.4's "How all occasions..." speech. I just thought that it was interesting to look at all of those different speeches as a bunch, instead of just individually.

Comparing this play to Titus was inevitable; I think we did a good job of comparing not only the different characters to each other, but also what the ideas of being a tragic hero mean in each of the plays.

So, I'd say that this is the play that I liked discussing the best. Hopefully this trend continues on into the next one!

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Current Forum: Hamlet

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Date: Sun Oct 26 2003 8:38 pm

Author: Wagner, Corinne <04clwagn@alma.edu>

Subject: "To be...done with Hamlet"

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I am actually kind of sad to be done with Hamlet already. Though our discussions were very good in class and on the forum, I still feel like there is more that we could discuss. (this may seem obvious to particularly the Shakespeare buffs, theater buffs and critics who spend years studying one such play, but I am speaking in terms of this class...with most of the other plays, I was very ready to move on, which is not the case this time.) Anyways...

In response to the discussion about Gertrude...there are many different views on her and her role in the play, as well as the effectiveness of our discussions concerning these things. I think that both Marisa and Stephanie (or Alainna, I think) have good points, and I think, collectively, they are on the same page. We DID spend a good portion of time discussing Gertrude, but we DID NOT come to any conclusions, and I am not sure that we are really supposed to. The ambiguity of her character makes it very difficult to do so, and I feel that she is one of the characters that Shakespeare specifically leaves open for interpretation. My thoughts on Gertrude have to be that she is just aloof, because I am always more likely to give people the benefit of the doubt...even characters in plays who ARE NOT REAL PEOPLE. On that note...

I would like to return quickly to our debate about the sexual orientation of Hamlet. First of all, bringing up debatable questions in class is not a ridiculous action. My question was intended, not to place Hamlet in a homosexual category, but more to get a feeling for whether or not the thought had ever crossed anyone else's mind, including professional critics. I was also attempting to use my liberal

arts education to incorporate things I had learned in other classes (ie...Crazy King Ludwig) into our discussion and my learning...something that I do not consider "ridiculous." I like to use that word just as much as the next guy, but let's be careful not to use it in describing the learning processes of fellow students.

Along with Stephanie (maybe?) I, too, found our discussions on the speeches particularly interesting. The idea that Hamlet was often times speaking to himself as opposed to others, makes their analysis so very different. Then, to compare them to his speeches to other people, sheds a completely different light on the matter. My favorite example of this concept was one that we discussed in class...Hamlet is speaking to Horatio (5.2 lines 157-61) and he in so many words asks if it is acceptable to leave the wordly life and your possessions at any time because they were never really "yours" to begin with. Basically, a question of suicide, he finally asks it of someone else, as opposed to his previous speeches to himself where he verbalizes similar points. I feel like Hamlet is attempting to reach out for guidance at this point. Instead of speaking only to himself, is it possible that he may realize that he can no longer handle the stress and pressure placed on him by the Ghost and be reaching out to Horatio for help? I think this shows a very human side of Hamlet, one that I tended to disregard in earlier parts of the play, where I saw him merely as a "character."

Those are all the thoughts I have for now...See you in class!

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Current Forum: Hamlet

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Date: Mon Oct 27 2003 6:57 pm

Author: White, Heather <04hlwhit@alma.edu>

Subject: It's over.

[Remove](#)

I agree with everyone else, I think we could have used some more time in our discussion, but it will be nice to move on to something else, we could spend weeks on Hamlet if we wanted to. I think Alice's observation about prose and verse is probably one of the best indicators that Hamlet is pretending to be mad. I also think the comparisons between Hamlet and Titus were pretty good, but I almost think that Hamlet is the evolution of Titus. They are similar but Hamlet is just more complex and refined, which I think really shows Shakespeare's growth as a writer.

I do not think we really discussed Ophelia enough though. Ophelia has become such a cultural icon. Not only in art, but in feminist culture and in theatre. How many actresses would love to play Ophelia? As tiny as the part is compared to some of her co-stars Ophelia is one of the characters people look forward to seeing the most.

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Current Forum: Hamlet

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Date: Mon Oct 27 2003 10:26 pm

Author: Sova, Alice <04aesova@alma.edu>

Subject: GERTRUDE

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Since I read two articles regarding Gertrude's role in the play, I am now feeling the urge to respond to all these Hamlet's mom questions. (That and I am required to post something.) The two articles are "The Character of Hamlet's Mother" by Carolyn Heilbrun (The one that Dr. O often referred to in class) and "Hamlet's Mother" by Baldwin Maxwell. These two articles take different perspectives on Gertrude, but both agree that she is of great value in the play. The one question I would like to address is:

Why did she marry Claudius?

Heilbrun: "Hamlet tells her: it is her lust, the need of sexual passion, which has driven her from the arms and memory of her husband to the incomparably cruder charms of his brother." (See 3.4.82-88 for his speech) Heilbrun also says, "This is not only a lust, but a lust which throws out of joint all the structure of human morality and relationships. And the queen admits it [in 3.4.88-91]" So, according to this perspective, Gertrude's "flaw" is her lust. But, Heilbrun also argues that, even through this, she is a noteworthy character. Her speeches are well spoken and intelligent and she is key to the entire plot. Try to imagine the play without Gertrude. Even try to imagine it with a guilty Gertrude or a Gertrude that does not care about her son. It would change a lot of how it is presented and would affect the overall tone.

Maxwell: In his article, Maxwell brings in multiple interpretations, then, sort of, comes up with his own conclusions. On this question, he seems to agree with John Draper in saying that her marriage was "politically necessary because of a national crisis, 'a marriage of more convenience than love.'" This supports the idea of Gertrude becoming a vulnerable widow after Hamlet's death, makes a decision to marry Claudius to save herself, the throne, etc. Personally, I like this explanation better, but the two could be combined just as well.

Both of these articles bring up great points that I tried to squeeze into our discussion as well. They argue for and against the idea of Gertrude being a flat character who seems unaware of what is going on and her as a caring mother to Hamlet, who is victimized by her own lust and an awful situation. If you would like more on either of these articles, let me know. I would even be willing to post my essay about them if that would help too. (After Thursday of course!)

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**Current Forum:** Hamlet

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Date: Mon Oct 27 2003 10:45 pm**Author:** Sova, Alice <04aesova@alma.edu>**Subject:** Hamlet and Ophelia

One thing we talked about in class that I couldn't figure out was why Hamlet took so long to kill Claudius. We said he needed to be sure that Claudius was the true murderer and also that Hamlet's "flaw" was his thinking and lack of action. We also talked a lot about his melancholy. Well, let's put these two together. (Psychology people help me out if I'm way off here.)

When I think of depression, thoughts have more to do with it than maybe anything else. Something bad happens, tragic even, but it's our response that defines our mood. If we dwell on it, think about it, spiral into thoughts that are completely sane or utterly ridiculous, our mood definitely changes. Our thoughts can overtake our being, to the point that functioning, even at a low level, can become very difficult. See a pattern here? Hamlet's thoughts lead him to the lack of action and his melancholy. (Which we traced through his soliloquies on Thursday.) Because he is a thinker, he puts himself into a state of depression and therefore cannot think clearly enough to perform the one duty his dead father called upon him to do. He thinks so much that, by the last soliloquies, when he seems ready to act, we are still unsure of whether or not he will do it. He does not make any plans. In fact, his revenge is very quick. I know, perhaps it's a stretch, and Hamlet's not real, but the theory works.

I agree with Heather on the fact that we did not discuss Ophelia enough. She is definitely an icon when it comes to representations in art and film. Maybe we should have asked why. Why are artists and actresses so drawn to this character? Perhaps she represents an idea of true innocence. She lost her father, her brother was gone, and Hamlet disowned her. She was the poor young lady, the victim of a terrible situation that she had no effect on, other than to listen to and obey her father. She died an innocent, which is how I can remember her being portrayed in many paintings. Perhaps that is why Shakespeare does not tell us whether or not she committed suicide. He does not want to harm her innocence any more than those that bury her do.

**Current Forum:** Hamlet

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Date: Tue Oct 28 2003 2:44 pm**Author:** Wagner, Corinne <04clwagn@alma.edu>**Subject:** Re: Hamlet and Ophelia

I think that you are right on in your description of Hamlet and his depression, melancholy, and lack of actions. The cool thing about psychology is that everyone is an expert because everyone goes through the same situations and thought processes. The different responses people have to such tragic events are what make people individuals...and in all reality, Hamlet, in this light, probably did not handle his situation that differently from the way most others would. Maybe he is not as "different" as we thought. Good call, Alice:)

