

HAMLET - ACT 3
SCENE 2



WWW.AOIFESNOTES.COM

HAMLET AND THE PLAYERS

- ❖ We are dropped straight into the action
- ❖ Hamlet instructs the players how to act and we see how cultured and intelligent he is
- ❖ Shakespeare may also be using Hamlet to express his - Shakespeare's - own view of the rather pantomime style of acting which was still common at the time the play was written and was Shakespeare's competition in the theatres of London



- ❖ Traditionally, actors playing villains hammed it up and shouted their lines out as loudly as possible, to prove their villainy.
- ❖ Hamlet wants the actors to behave more realistically.
- ❖ Termegant was wrongly believed by mediaeval Christians to be a violent Muslim god and would therefore be hugely and loudly over-acted to prove his villainy to a Christian audience!

VOCABULARY LESSON

- ❖ ‘Termegant’ is now used to describe a violent, quarrelsome, overbearing woman.



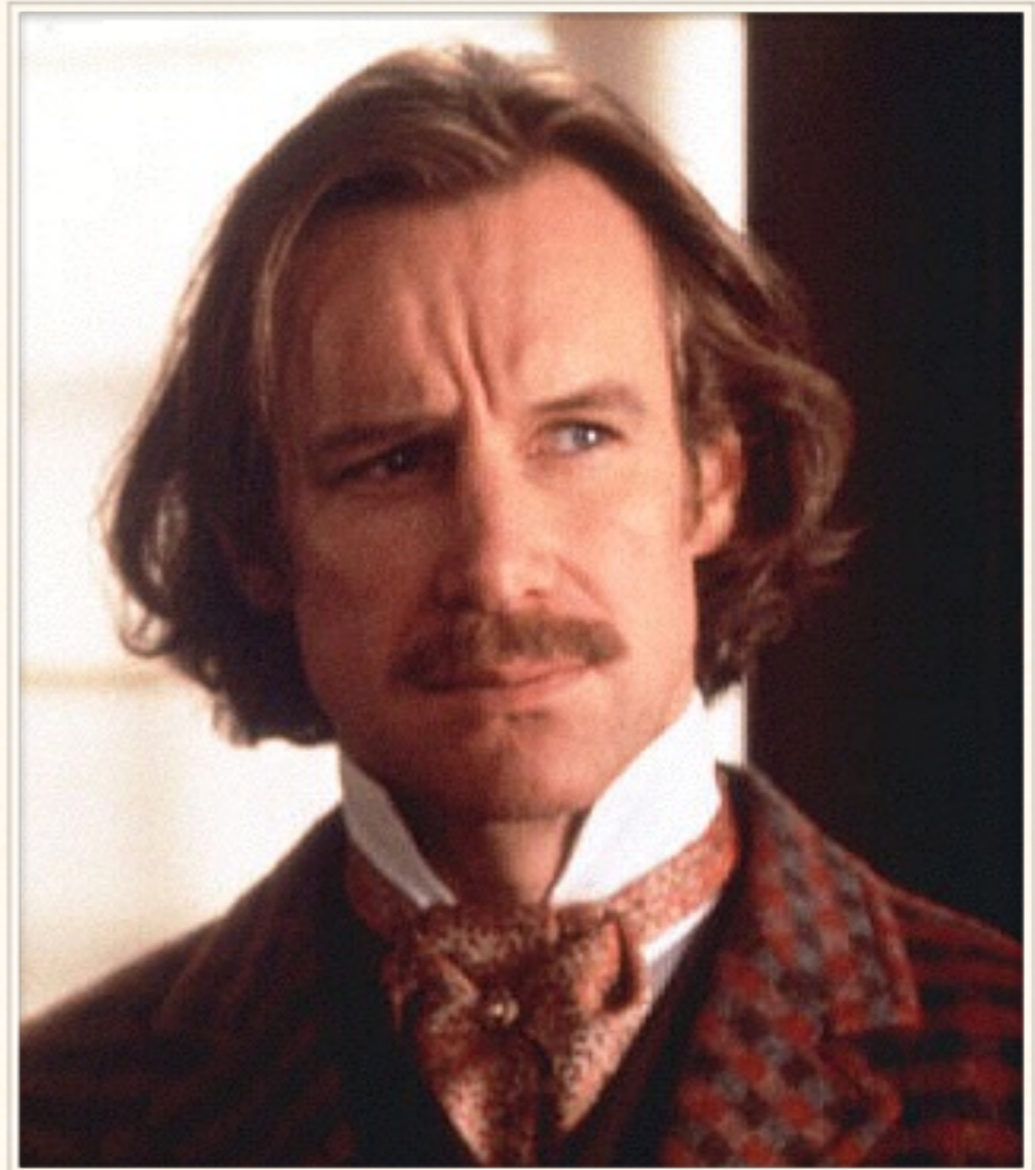
CONTRADICTION

- ❖ Hamlet calls for restraint in the acting of the play, but this is at odds with his earlier comments in his soliloquy (Act II Scene ii) in which he said how impressed he was by the passion of the actor who was so moved by Hecuba's anguish

- ❖ Hamlet thinks little or nothing of the common people, scorning the 'groundlings' for their delighted reaction to clownish, over-acted plays.
- ❖ He also disparages tradesmen, saying that the actors are so dreadful that they appear less than human and seem to have been made by unskilled apprentices rather than by Nature.
- ❖ Hamlet is an intellectual and seems to have a low opinion of ordinary people.

HORATIO AND FRIENDSHIP

- ❖ False friend - Rosencrantz and Guildenstern - are sent away
- ❖ True friend - Horatio - is welcomed
- ❖ Note the qualities in Horatio that Hamlet values: reasonable, honest, cheerful, sensible and not 'passion's slave'.
- ❖ Does Hamlet possess these qualities? Is Horatio a foil to him?
- ❖ Horatio is once again asked to be the credible and honest witness.



HAMLET AND CLAUDIUS

- ❖ Hamlet feigns madness once more but there is a point to what he says to Claudius
- ❖ He plays with the words 'air' and 'heir', showing that he does not believe Claudius will make him his heir and that his promises are as empty as air
- ❖ Chameleons change to blend in, just as Claudius has done
- ❖ (It was believed at the time that chameleons lived on air.)

HAMLET AND POLONIUS

- ❖ Polonius says that he once played the part of Caesar in a play
- ❖ This might be a bit of an in-joke, as the actor who originally played the role of Polonius - John Hemmings - had recently played the role of Julius Caesar

HAMLET AND OPHELIA

- ❖ Hamlet is incredibly crude in his dealings with Ophelia, asking if he can lie in her lap, which might mean 'Can I have sex with you?' and when she refuses, pretends that all he meant was lie down on her lap.
- ❖ He plays on words such as 'country' and 'nothing' to make her feel deeply uncomfortable. He emphasises the first syllable of the word 'country' (which meant then what it does now) and his reference to 'thing' and 'nothing' mean penis and vagina respectively.
- ❖ Poor Ophelia is damned if she understands his references and damned if she does not

- ❖ Ophelia says it is 'twice two months' - or four months - since Old Hamlet has died
- ❖ This shows us that some time has passed since Act 1, in which we learned that it was two months since Old Hamlet died
- ❖ Hamlet sarcastically says that if it is a full four months, then of course they should forget his father and move on

THE PLAY - DUMBSHOW (SHORT MIME WHICH SUMMARISES THE PLOT OF THE PLAY TO COME)

- ❖ Ophelia seems alone in having taken in what the dumbshow represents
- ❖ Many critics have speculated on the reason for Claudius not reacting to the dumbshow. Perhaps he is too skilled an actor himself to react, or perhaps he was talking to Gertrude and Polonius and did not see it at all.

- ❖ Ophelia asks Hamlet if the actor who reads the Prologue will 'show' or explain what the play means.
- ❖ Hamlet crudely replies that the actor will tell her what anything she 'shows' him means. He is implying that Ophelia might be the sort of person to show the actor some intimate part of herself.
- ❖ Ophelia says Hamlet is being obscene, and turns to watch the play rather than listen to him.

THE PROLOGUE

- ❖ This was a dramatic device to give the audience the essence of the play. Shakespeare used it in *Romeo and Juliet* but afterwards abandoned it, assuming by then that his audience was capable of understanding what was going on in the play.
- ❖ Hamlet is disgusted that the prologue is so brief, comparing its three-line length to a short inscription on the inside of a ring.



THE PLAYER KING AND QUEEN

- ❖ The player queen loves her husband and, like Gertrude and Old Hamlet, they have been married thirty years
- ❖ The reference to the plot to kill the king begins
- ❖ The player queen rejects her husband's suggestion that she may remarry after his death. She says that any woman who would take a second husband would have to have conspired to kill her first husband.

- ❖ Hamlet remarks that these words are like ‘wormwood’, which is a bitter herb used in medicine but which can also be a poison.
- ❖ He is suggesting that Gertrude and Claudius will find the player king and queen’s words bitter and maybe even poisonous.

GERTRUDE - IS SHE GUILTY?

- ❖ The ghost told Hamlet not to punish Gertrude
- ❖ The player queen says that if she kissed her second husband in bed it would be like killing her first husband all over again



- ❖ The player king tells his wife that time changes all emotions and that firm intentions may weaken over time, just as firm apples may ripen and fall from the tree.
- ❖ The player queen promises she will never remarry, but Hamlet wonders if she can keep her word. He is obviously hoping that Gertrude and Claudius are watching the events as they unfold.

GERTRUDE AND CLAUDIUS REACT

- ❖ Gertrude does not see that the play mirrors her own situation in any way, as she is innocent.
- ❖ Hamlet probably makes up the plays name - The Mousetrap - to show that the play is aimed at trapping 'the conscience of the King'



THE MURDER OF GONZAGO

- ❖ Based on a true story, and possibly the inspiration for Shakespeare's Claudius
- ❖ In 1538, the Duke of Urbino, who married into the Gonzago family, was murdered by Luigi Gonzago who poured poison in his ear.



- ❖ Claudius asks Hamlet about the play and Hamlet tells him there is nothing offensive at all in it. He says it might bother the guilty but as neither he nor Claudius are guilty of anything, they have nothing to fear.
- ❖ Lucianus, the King's nephew, enters.
- ❖ Hamlet is impatient for the action to move swiftly

THE PLOT HAS WORKED

- ❖ When Lucianus pours poison in the King's ear, Claudius rises and leaves.
- ❖ Gertrude leaves too, although she has no idea what is going on.
- ❖ Everyone but Hamlet and Horatio leave.



HAMLET'S REACTION

- ❖ He is delighted that his plan has worked
- ❖ Hamlet sings of Damon and Pythias who showed just how loyal friends could be. (In the Ancient Greek story, Pythias was accused of plotting against Dionysius, the tyrannical ruler of Syracuse, and sentenced to death. He asked to be allowed to return home to settle his affairs, but Dionysius refused, believing he would never return. Damon offered to stand in his place and face execution if Pythias did not return. Pythias did return, and an impressed Dionysius freed them both.)
- ❖ This song is a reference to Horatio's loyalty

PROOF

- ❖ Now Hamlet knows that the Ghost spoke the truth
- ❖ Therefore, he should act!

GERTRUDE

- ❖ Sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to Hamlet with a message
- ❖ Claudius is in a rage
- ❖ Gertrude is bewildered by Hamlet's behaviour and wants to see him in her room



- ❖ Hamlet uses the royal 'We' when talking to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
- ❖ He is confident and princely
- ❖ Hamlet feels he could be king
- ❖ He takes Guildenstern aside and, taking a recorder from the musicians, asks him to play it

- ❖ Guildenstern says he cannot and Hamlet pretends to be surprised, saying that Guildenstern played him, Hamlet, like an instrument when he tried to trick and manipulate him.
- ❖ Hamlet shows that he is not mad at all and makes it clear that he will not be 'played' by Guildenstern

HAMLET AND POLONIUS

- ❖ Polonius plays along with Hamlet's mockery because he, Hamlet, is a prince and agrees with everything he says.
- ❖ Our final meeting with Polonius cements the idea of his being a sycophantic hypocrite
- ❖ Hamlet says he will go to Gertrude's room



HAMLET'S SOLILOQUY

- ❖ Hamlet is so furious he could drink hot blood and cause an earthquake
- ❖ He calms himself in order to visit his mother
- ❖ Hamlet believes his mother is guilty of moving on too fast but does not want to be as hard as Nero who had his mother killed for murdering his - Nero's - father and marrying the dead man's brother

