

HAMLET ACT 1 SCENE 1



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SETTING THE SCENE

- ❖ Dramatic opening
- ❖ Dark and cold: sets the mood of the play
- ❖ Bernardo questions the guard rather than the other way around. This introduces the idea of a world which is turned upside down.
- ❖ Changing of the guard represents the changing from one king to another.
- ❖ Guards seem fearful. Why? Audience picks up on the tension.
- ❖ Francisco is 'sick at heart': this is the first mention of disease and sickness. We wonder **why** he feels this way.

THE GHOST

- ❖ Elizabethans were more sympathetic to the notion of a vengeful ghost than modern audiences may be.
- ❖ Marcellus' second utterance reinforces the idea of fear: 'What, has this thing appeared again tonight?' The audience is intrigued. What 'thing' does he mean?

- ❖ Horatio is sceptical about the existence of the ghost.
- ❖ Barnardo uses martial language when speaking to Horatio: 'let us once again assail your ears, That are so fortified against our story'. This adds to the sense of danger.
- ❖ Vengeful ghosts were a popular dramatic device. The ghost of Caesar appeared to Brutus in *Julius Caesar*.

- ❖ The ghost's nature and purpose is unclear so the men are keen to find out if it is the devil or a restless spirit.
- ❖ Horatio is a scholar, which means he can speak Latin. If the ghost is an evil spirit he will be able to exorcise it.
- ❖ Barnado refers twice to the fact that the ghost looks like the dead king. This raises yet more questions.

FIRST APPEARANCE OF THE GHOST...

- ❖ Horatio, the impartial witness, notes that the ghost looks like the dead king.
- ❖ The audience wonders **why** the dead king should be a restless spirit. Sense of mystery increases.



ALL IS NOT WELL IN DENMARK

- ❖ Marcellus asks Horatio why Denmark is on a war footing.
- ❖ Day and night, seven days a week, men are labouring to produce enough ships and armaments to supply the army. They are even buying weapons from abroad, they are in such haste.

ANACHRONISM

- ❖ An anachronism (from the Greek 'ana' meaning 'against' and 'khronos' meaning 'time',) is a word used to describe something that is out of its correct time or chronologically inconsistent. It is usually used to describe an error in literature in which the author places a person, object or event in the same time as a person, object or event from a different time period.
- ❖ Cannons would not have been available at the time in which Hamlet was set. (Marcellus mentions them in line 74.)



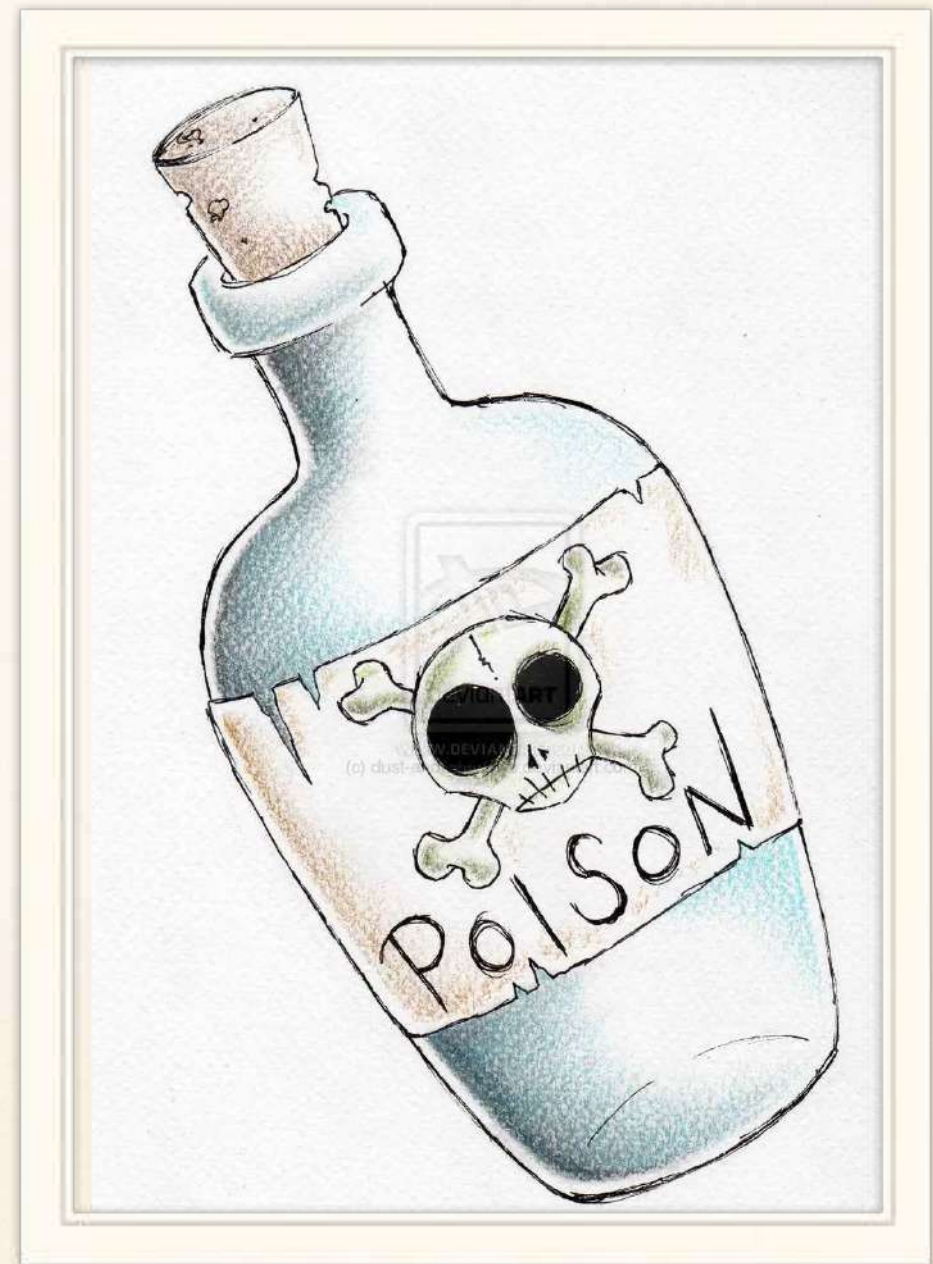
POLITICAL BACKDROP

- ❖ Old Hamlet and Old Fortinbras fought a duel and Old Hamlet won.
- ❖ Horatio explains that young Fortinbras is keen to avenge his father's defeat at the hands of the old king Hamlet.



FOUL PLAY?

- ❖ The men on guard come to the conclusion that the ghost of the dead king has appeared to warn them about the threat of invasion from young Fortinbras and his band of followers.
- ❖ Nobody thinks the ghost might be seeking vengeance as nobody yet suspects his death was unnatural.



SHAMELESS PLUG?

- ❖ Shakespeare refers to his hugely successful play *Julius Caesar* when he has Horatio comment on the dreadful omens that appeared in Rome shortly before the murder of Caesar.
- ❖ *Julius Caesar* had been the Globe's first premiere and went on to become a sellout triumph for Shakespeare.
- ❖ Brutus is often thought to be the forerunner to Hamlet in that both men agonise over right and wrong and wonder whether or not they should act.



PATHETIC FALLACY

PATHETIC FALLACY IS A LITERARY
DEVICE IN WHICH NATURE REFLECTS
THE ACTIONS OF MAN AND HAS
FEELINGS FOR HUMANITY.

OMENS SUCH AS ECLIPSES ARE
EXAMPLES OF THIS.



HORATIO'S QUESTIONS

- ❖ He asks the ghost if he can help it without doing anything dishonourable.
- ❖ He asks if it has a hidden treasure, the location of which it did not reveal before its death. The belief that restless spirits could roam because they had not imparted such information to their family was a common belief in Elizabethan times.



BELIEF SYSTEMS

- ❖ Horatio thinks the ghost may be evil because it vanished at daybreak. What might it be that banishes ghosts?
- ❖ Horatio refers to Phoebus, the Greek god of sun.
- ❖ Marcellus refers to Christmas time.
- ❖ Both men think that such deities may banish ghosts and the incongruity of the mixture of belief systems appears to go unnoticed!

CLOSE OF ACT 1 SCENE 1

- ❖ The men agree that they should tell young Hamlet what has happened.
- ❖ We have learned a great deal in the first act but none of it has been awkwardly imparted. Instead, we have been drawn into the drama and intrigue of life in the Danish court through the poetic and engaging speeches of the soldiers we have met so far. And there is more to come...