

HAMLET - ACT 1

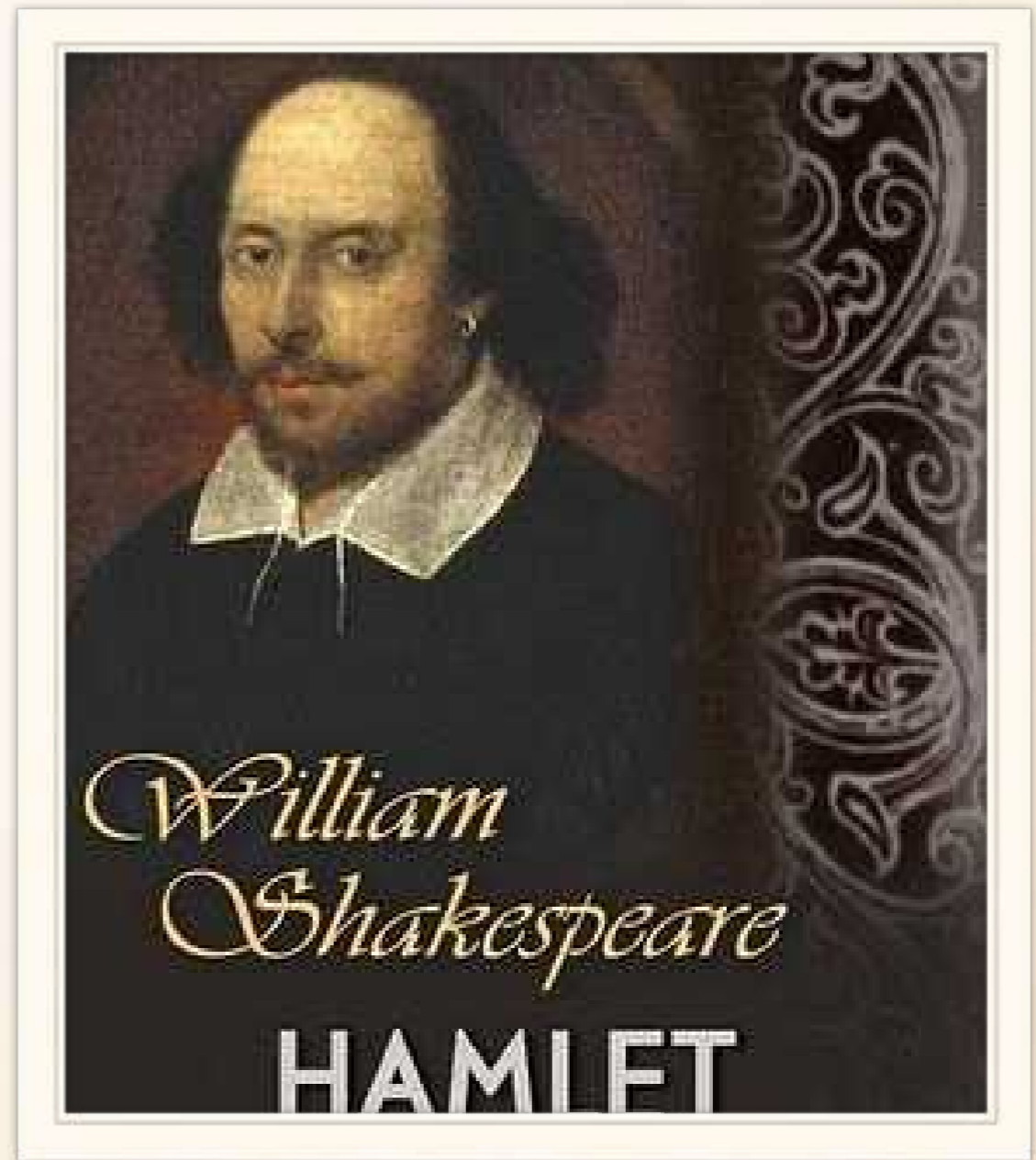
SCENE 2



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FIRST IMPRESSION OF HAMLET

- ❖ He is the only member of the court dressed in mourning.
- ❖ He stands out from the rest



CLAUDIUS

- ❖ Uses the royal 'we': has he a high opinion of himself?
- ❖ Has a hard act to follow as everyone seems to have thought highly of his predecessor, old Hamlet.
- ❖ Skilfully diverts attention away from his recent incestuous marriage by focusing on threat from Norway.
- ❖ Is he a good king or is he a clever manipulator of circumstances?
- ❖ Encourages everyone to focus on the future rather than the death of old Hamlet.

- ❖ Claudius speaks in a **euphuistic** style. This means that he uses ornate language full of literary devices. It was popular during the time the play was written. The argument made appears balanced and the point is not reached until the end. Look at Claudius' depiction of his marriage (Lines 8 to 14). He doesn't say 'Taken to wife' until the very end of his convoluted sentence.
- ❖ Uses diplomacy as a first recourse to deal with young Fortinbras.
- ❖ Old Hamlet was a warlike man but Claudius does not appear to be.

POWERFUL

- ❖ Claudius' dealing with Laertes shows again how powerful he is. He points out that he can grant Laertes whatever he want if he, Claudius, decides to do so.



HAMLET AND CLAUDIUS

- ❖ Claudius needs the support of his people. He tries to win Hamlet over, calling him 'cousin' and 'son'. ('Cousin' merely meant relation at the time the play was written.)
- ❖ Hamlet's obvious dislike of his stepfather could be a problem for Claudius. Hamlet is heir to the throne. Claudius needs to keep him on side.
- ❖ Hamlet's first words are an aside: he cannot directly challenge Claudius.



- ❖ Hamlet is witty and his short, cutting remark 'I am too much 'i the sun', gets to the heart of the matter. He does not like Claudius calling him 'son'.
- ❖ Gertrude begs Hamlet to appear less unhappy. Hamlet says it is not that he 'seems' unhappy; he really is! He is not acting, as others might. Hamlet is clearly hinting that neither Claudius nor Gertrude are truly mourning.
- ❖ This idea of seeming - appearance versus reality - is central to the play.

CLAUDIUS' ATTACK

- ❖ Claudius once again presents us with a euphuistic speech in which he criticises Hamlet while appearing balanced and reasonable. He says Hamlet is behaving in an immature, unnatural way by mourning so deeply.
- ❖ Claudius uses the royal 'We' again, even though his words to Hamlet are personal. The pair are clearly not close.

WITTENBERG

- ❖ Did not exist as a university at the time in which the play was set.
- ❖ Shakespeare is aligning Hamlet with Protestant values by linking him to Wittenberg. Claudius is linked to Catholicism.
- ❖ Protestant - man is control of his own destiny
- ❖ Catholic - God is in charge of man's destiny



HAMLET'S SOLILOQUY

- ❖ Claudius leaves with Gertrude, having shown his pleasure at Hamlet's decision to remain.
- ❖ Note that Hamlet stayed because his mother asked, *not* because Claudius asked.
- ❖ Alone, Hamlet shares his thoughts with the audience.

O! THAT THIS TOO TOO SOLID FLESH WOULD
MELT...

- ❖ Some versions say 'Sullied', meaning dirtied (is being near Claudius so dreadful that he feels sullied by it?)
- ❖ Some say 'Sallied', meaning attacked
- ❖ 'Solid' is the most popular choice nowadays and it goes well with 'melt'



- ❖ Straight away we see that the unhappy young man cannot take action even though he suspects Claudius of something.
- ❖ Hamlet feels inadequate compared to his late father whom he idealises.
- ❖ ‘Hyperion to a satyr’: Old Hamlet was like a god, while Claudius is like a lecherous satyr: half-man, half-goat.
- ❖ Niobe: tragic figure in Greek mythology who grieved so much for her dead children that she turned into a permanently weeping statue.

HORATIO AND HAMLET

- ❖ Hamlet is delighted to see Horatio.
- ❖ He comments darkly that the meats served at the funeral were still fresh enough to be served at the wedding.
- ❖ Horatio tells Hamlet about the ghost.
- ❖ Hamlet is suspicious now and wonders for the first time if his father's death was natural. He believes that such a crime cannot be hidden: 'Foul deeds will rise'.