

Hamlet

Week 4

By the end of the play, eight of the main characters have died (in order: Polonius, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Ophelia, Laertes, Gertrude, Hamlet, Claudius). Arguably all these deaths stem in some way from Claudius' murder of King Hamlet.

Things to Think About:

- What was Hamlet's goal throughout the play? Does it change? Does he succeed? What does he achieve?
- What does it mean to be noble? Does Hamlet fit that description? Does he try?

Exercise 1:

The turning point in *Hamlet* arguably occurs during the play-within-a-play, when Hamlet realizes that the Ghost was telling the truth and when Claudius realizes that Hamlet knows what he has done. What motivation do you think Shakespeare had in making the performance of a theatre troupe so integral to the play's action?



Watch [this performance](#) of *The Mousetrap* from Kenneth Branagh's 1992 film, *Hamlet*. How does Hamlet act? When does Claudius realize how much Hamlet knows?

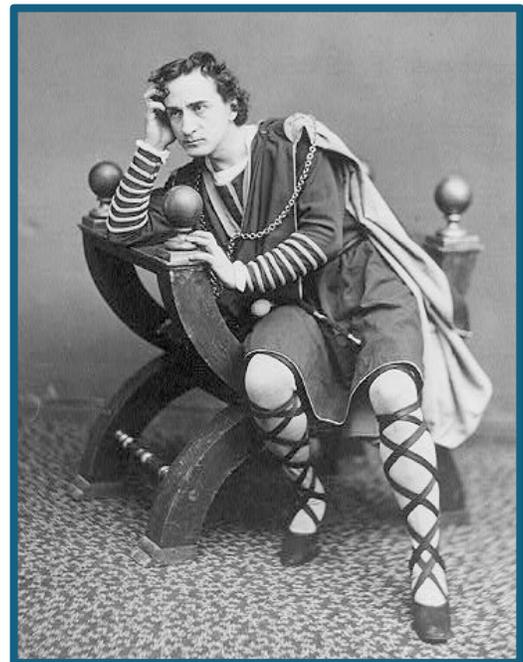
Exercise 2:

Because Hamlet was the son of King Hamlet, one might assume that he would inherit the throne after King Hamlet's death. However, prior to 1660, the Danish monarch was appointed by the Danish parliament in an election. Often the monarchy was still passed from father to son, however, in Hamlet's case, Claudius managed to get the appointment instead. Hamlet says:

“He that hath killed my king and whored my mother,
Popped in between th' election and my hopes,
Thrown out his angle for my proper life,
And with such cozenage—is 't not perfect
conscience
To quit him with this arm? And is 't not to be
damned
To let this canker of our nature come
In further evil?” (5.2.71-80).

With this bit of knowledge in mind, does it change how you view Hamlet's intentions? Do you think he pursued Claudius solely to avenge his father? Why or why not?

Find one of Hamlet's lines that supports your answer.



Exercise 3:

Take a look at Horatio's speech from 5.2 below. To what specific plot points does Horatio refer? Chart them out in the table below. Who does each action? Were any of these events avoidable? What might have happened instead?

“And let me speak to th’ yet unknowing world
How these things came about. So shall you hear
Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
Fall’n on th’ inventors’ heads. All this can I
Truly deliver.” (5.2.421-428).

	Who did what?
“Carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts”	
“Accidental judgments”	

“Casual slaughters”	
“Deaths put on by cunning and forced cause”	
“Purposes mistook Fall’n on th’ inventors’ heads”	

Shakespeare and Social Justice:

- Horatio has no apparent status in the play other than he is Hamlet’s friend. What do you think will happen to him after the play concludes? How do the choices of those in society who have more influence affect those with less?
- Does everyone in Hamlet deserve their outcome? Does each character make a choice that decides the outcome of their storyline, or is their fate decided by others?