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Literature, William Shakespeare



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City Home Reading Report A Critical Documentary On the film HAMLET by:
William Shakespeare Jhon Lee F. Farne III-2 SSC (Cayabyab) NOVEMBER 7,
2011 Hamlet Facts About the Play Hamlet was written sometime between
1599 and 1601 and is often considered the greatest achievement of the
world's greatest playwright. It has been performed and translated more than
any other play in the world. It has had more written about it — and has
inspired more parodies and spin-offs -- than any other literary work. Its
famous “ To be or not to be" is the most quoted phrase in the English
language. Hamlet has inspired 26 ballets, six operas and dozens of musical
works. There have been more than 45 movie versions, including those by
Laurence Olivier, Mel Gibson and Kenneth Branagh. Hamlet is Shakespeare's
longest play. Uncut, it would take between four and a half and five hours to
perform. Hamlet himself has 1, 530 lines -- more than any other
Shakespearean character. Three different texts of Hamlet were published in
Shakespeare's time. The Revenge of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark was entered
in the Stationer's Register in 1603 and is now known as the First Quarto. It is
considered to have been a pirated edition, assembled from the memories of
actors, and is full of inaccuracies. A second Quarto appeared in 1604.
Believed to have been printed from Shakespeare's own manuscript, it was
inscribed: “ newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it
was, according to the true and perfect Coppie. " This version is the source of
most modern editions. A revised, cut, version of the Second Quarto appeared
in the First Folio of 1623. This version is believed to have been revised from
a prompt book or actor's copy of the script, since the lines that have been

cut are literary rather than dramatic. Settings . The main setting is Elsinore Castle in eastern Denmark, on the Åresund strait separating the Danish island of Sjælland (Zealand) from the Swedish province of Skåne and linking the Baltic Sea in the south to the Kattegat Strait in the north. Elsinore is a real town. Its Danish name is Helsingør. In Shakespeare's time, Elsinore was an extremely important port that fattened its coffers by charging a toll for ship passage through the Åresund strait. Modern Elsinore, or Helsingør, is directly west of a Swedish city with a similar name, Helsingborg (or Hålsingborg). Within the city limits of Elsinore is Kronborg Castle, said to be the model for the Elsinore Castle of Shakespeare's play. Construction on the castle began in 1574, when Shakespeare was ten, and ended in 1585, when Shakespeare was twenty-one. It is believed that actors known to Shakespeare performed at Kronborg Castle. Other settings in Hamlet are a plain in Denmark, near Elsinore, and a churchyard near Elsinore. Offstage action in the play (referred to in dialogue) takes place on a ship bound for England from Denmark on which Hamlet replaces instructions to execute him (see the plot summary below) with instructions to execute his traitorous companions, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and on a pirate ship that returns him to Denmark. PLOT After the death of his beloved father King Hamlet, a grief-stricken Prince Hamlet returns home from his studies in Wittenburg to the Danish court at Elsinore. Hamlet senior's brother, Claudius, has assumed the old king's place in more ways than one -- as ruler of Denmark and as a second husband to Gertrude, Hamlet's mother--with less than two months having passed since the king's death. The prince, profoundly disturbed by the shocking speed of these events, struggles to find

meaning in his radically altered world. The old king's ghost tells Hamlet that he was murdered by Claudius and exhorts him to kill Claudius in revenge; Hamlet vows to think of nothing else, but his restless intellect soon plunges him into uncertainty about the rightness of the deed he's sworn to do. He comes up with a plan to act as if he is mad to conceal his true intentions from the new king while he seeks concrete proof of his guilt. Hamlet had shown a romantic interest in Ophelia, but her father, Polonius, intervened, insisting she reject the prince's attentions. Hamlet's subsequent odd behaviour, especially with Ophelia, leads Polonius to conclude that he has been driven mad for want of her love. Claudius distrusts his step-son and sends to Wittenburg for two of his friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, hoping they will get Hamlet to reveal his true state of mind. Self-doubting and guilt-ridden about his failure to act on his vow of revenge, Hamlet seizes on the opportunity presented by the visit of a band of traveling players and has them reenact the death of the old king in front of the new. Claudius reacts violently to the play, giving Hamlet his proof and a renewed resolve to act, which he does later that night in his mother's chamber when he mistakes an eavesdropping Polonius for Claudius, killing him. Hamlet's murderous intentions now revealed, Claudius immediately acts to eliminate him. He sends Hamlet to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; a secret letter Hamlet's former friends carry will ensure his speedy execution by that country's king. But Hamlet outsmarts his enemies and makes his way back to Denmark, only to find that Ophelia, driven mad by his rejection and her father's murder, has drowned under circumstances that suggest suicide. Laertes, her brother, returns from university in Paris for her funeral. He vows

vengeance against Hamlet for the deaths of his father and sister. Claudius and Laertes plot together against Hamlet, making arrangements for a duel between the young men that isn't what it appears to be: both Laertes's sword and a cup of wine to be offered by the king are poisoned. Hamlet is cut by Laertes' s poisoned sword, but winds up exchanging his own sword for it as the duel progresses. Queen Gertrude accidentally drinks the poisoned wine and dies. Hamlet wounds Laertes with the poisoned sword; he reveals the plot and forgives Hamlet for the death of Polonius before he dies. In his last few moments of life Hamlet kills Claudius. Fortinbras, the valiant prince of Norway, is Hamlet's chosen successor to the Danish Throne.

Major Characters: The Older Generation Claudius: The antagonist of the play and the new king of Denmark. Claudius is the " smiling, damned villain" of the piece, a devious, lustful, and corrupt politician and master manipulator of people and circumstances. Despite the darkness in his soul, his seemingly genuine love for Gertrude and his pangs of conscience over his crimes add a more sympathetic dimension to his personality. Gertrude: The Queen of Denmark and Hamlet's mother. Gertrude's secret affair with Claudius, her brother-in-law, culminates in their very public marriage. While Gertrude is a loving mother to Hamlet, her excessive sensuality and desire for social status motivate her immoral behaviour. Polonius: Lord Chamberlain of the Danish court and counselor to King Claudius. Polonius is the suspicious and controlling father of Ophelia and Laertes. He is a self-important, rather bumbling schemer and Claudius' chief spy against Hamlet. The Ghost: The spirit of King Hamlet, the prince's murdered father. The Ghost calls upon Hamlet to avenge his murder by killing Claudius, his uncle/step-father/king,

but the true origin of this spirit is never made clear. Hamlet fears it may be have been sent by the devil to manipulate him into performing an evil act. Shakespeare is said to have played this role in the first production of Hamlet.

Major Characters: The Younger Generation Hamlet: The protagonist of the play and prince of Denmark. He is around 30 years old when the play opens. Hamlet is the natural son of Queen Gertrude and the recently deceased old king from whom he takes his name. As a result of his mother's hasty remarriage to Claudius, her former brother-in-law, Hamlet's former uncle is now also his step-father and the new king. Hamlet's keen wit, intellectual gifts, and natural tendency to question things make him an ideal candidate for the studies he has pursued at university in Wittenburg, but the events that bring him back home to Elsinore Castle have left him cynical and embittered. Horatio: Hamlet's one true friend and trusted ally. They attended university in Wittenburg together. He has a calm, skeptical, and dispassionate outlook that helps to balance Hamlet's intellectual and emotional excesses. Hamlet entrusts him with the task of telling his story to the world after his death. Ophelia: Polonius' young, beautiful, and emotionally vulnerable daughter, sister to Laertes and Hamlet's love interest until he ruthlessly rejects her. Dutiful and obedient, Ophelia passively accepts her father's and brother's commands to reject Hamlet's advances. She allows herself to be used as bait in the trap Polonius lays to spy on Hamlet. Her madness and subsequent death fuel her brother's desire to take revenge on Hamlet. Laertes: Son of Polonius and brother of Ophelia. Laertes' rash and action-oriented approach to seeking revenge against Hamlet in the last acts of the play contrasts sharply with Hamlet's brooding hesitancy over

killing Claudius. In this way Laertes is a far more typical revenge tragedy figure than Hamlet. Fortinbras: The young prince of Norway. Themes .

Hesitation: Hamlet has an obligation to avenge his father's murder, according to the customs of his time. But he also has an obligation to abide by the moral law, which dictates, " Thou shalt not kill. " Consequently, Hamlet has great difficulty deciding what to do and, thus, hesitates to take decisive action. In his famous critiques of Shakespeare's works, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) has written: He is all dispatch and resolution as far as words and present intentions are concerned, but all hesitation and irresolution when called upon to carry his words and intentions into effect; so that, resolving to do everything, he does nothing. He is full of purpose but void of that quality of mind which accomplishes purpose. . . . Shakespeare wished to impress upon us the truth that action is the chief end of existence—that no faculties of intellect, however brilliant, can be considered valuable, or indeed otherwise than as misfortunes, if they withdraw us from or rend us repugnant to action, and lead us to think and think of doing until the time has elapsed when we can do anything effectually. Inherited Sin and Corruption: Humans are fallen creatures, victims of the devil's trickery as described in Genesis. Allusions or direct references to Adam, the Garden of Eden, and original sin occur throughout the play. In the first act, Shakespeare discloses that King Hamlet died in an orchard (Garden of Eden) from the bite of a serpent (Claudius). Later, Hamlet alludes to the burdens imposed by original sin when he says, in his famous " To be, or not to be" soliloquy, that the " flesh is heir to" tribulation in the form of " heart-ache" and a " thousand natural shocks" (3. 1. 72-73). In the third scene of the

same act, Claudius compares himself with the biblical Cain. In Genesis, Cain, the first son of Adam and Eve, kills his brother, Abel, the second son, after God accepts Abel's sacrifice but not Cain's. Like Cain, Claudius kills his brother, old King Hamlet. Claudius recognizes his Cain-like crime when he says: "O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven; It hath the primal eldest curse upon t, A brother's murder. (3. 3. 42-44) In Act V, the second gravedigger tells the first gravedigger that Ophelia, who apparently committed suicide, would not receive a Christian burial if she were a commoner instead of a noble. In his reply, the first gravedigger refers directly to Adam: "Why, there thou sayest: and the more pity that great folk should have countenance in this world to drown or hang themselves more than their even Christian. Come, my spade. There is no ancient gentlemen but gardeners, ditchers, and grave-makers: they hold up Adam's profession" (5. 1. 13). After the gravedigger tosses Yorick's skull to Hamlet, the prince observes: "That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once: how the knave jowls it to the ground, as if it were Cain's jaw-bone, that did the first murder!" (5. 1. 34). All of these references to Genesis seem to suggest that Hamlet is a kind of Everyman who inherits "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune"-that is, the effects of original sin.

Sons Seeking Revenge: Young Fortinbras seeks revenge against Elsinore because King Hamlet had killed the father of Fortinbras, King Fortinbras. Hamlet seeks to avenge the murder of his father, King Hamlet, by Claudius, the king's brother and Hamlet's uncle. Laertes seeks revenge against Hamlet for killing his father, Polonius, the lord chamberlain.

Deception: Deception makes up a major motif in Hamlet. On the one hand, Claudius conceals his murder of Hamlet's father.

On the other, Hamlet conceals his knowledge of the murder. He also wonders whether the Ghost is deceiving him, pretending to be old King Hamlet when he is really a devil. Polonius secretly tattles on Hamlet to Claudius. Hamlet feigns madness. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern pretend to have Hamlet's best interests at heart while attempting to carry out Claudius's scheme to kill Hamlet. After that scheme fails, Claudius and Laertes connive to kill Hamlet during the fencing match. However, that scheme also goes awry when Gertrude drinks from a poisoned cup prepared for Hamlet.

Ambition: Claudius so covets the throne that he murders his own brother, King Hamlet, to win it. In this respect he is like Macbeth and Richard III in other Shakespeare plays, who also murder their way to the Crown. Whether Claudius's ambition to be king was stronger than his desire to marry Gertrude is arguable, but both were factors, as he admits to himself in Act III, Scene III, when he reflects on his guilt: " I am still possessed / Of those effects for which I did the murder, / My crown, mine own ambition and my queen. . . ." (60-61).

Loyalty: Hamlet is loyal to his father's memory, as is Laertes to the memory of his father, Polonius, and his sister, Ophelia. Gertrude is torn between loyalty to Claudius and Hamlet. Horatio remains loyal to Hamlet to the end. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, school pals of Hamlet, betray Hamlet and spy on him.

Mischance, Coincidence, and Serendipity: Hamlet " just happens" to kill Polonius. Pirates " just happen" to rescue Hamlet. Hamlet " just happens" to come across Ophelia's funeral upon his return to Denmark. Hamlet and Laertes " just happen" to exchange swords—one of them with a poisoned tip—in their duel. Gertrude " just happens" to drink from a poisoned cup meant for Hamlet. Fate, or

unabashed plot contrivance, works its wonders in this Shakespeare play.

Christ-like Hamlet: Hamlet is like Christ, George Bernard Shaw has observed, in that he struggles against the old order, which requires an eye for an eye, as Christ did. Madness: Madness, pretended or real, wears the mask of sanity. In his attempt to prove Claudius's guilt, Hamlet puts on an "antic disposition"—that is, he pretends madness. But is he really mentally unbalanced? Perhaps. Serpentine Satan: Imagery throughout the play dwells on Satan's toxic influence on Elsinore and its inhabitants. Particularly striking are the snake metaphors. It is the venom of a serpent (in the person of Claudius) that kills old King Hamlet. Claudius, remember, had poured poison into the king's ear as reported by the Ghost of the old king: While "sleeping in mine orchard," the Ghost says, "A serpent stung me" (1. 5. 42-43). It is a sword—a steel snake, as it were—that kills Polonius, Hamlet, Laertes, and Claudius. (The sword that kills Hamlet and Laertes is tipped with poison.) Moreover, it is a poisoned drink that kills Gertrude. As for Ophelia, it is poisoned words that kill her. The word poison and its forms (such as poisons, poisoner, and poisoning) occur thirteen times in the play. Serpent occurs twice, venom or envenom six times, devil nine times, and hell or hellish eleven times. Garden (as a symbol for the Garden of Eden) or gardener occurs three times. Adam occurs twice. Ambiguous Spirit World: In Shakespeare's time, ghosts were thought by some people to be devils masquerading as dead loved ones. Their purpose was to win souls for Satan. It is understandable, then, that Hamlet is reluctant at first to assume that the Ghost on the castle battlements is really the spirit of his father. Hamlet acknowledges his doubt at the end of Act II: The spirit that I have seen

May be the devil: and the devil hath power To assume a pleasing shape;
yea, and perhaps Out of my weakness and my melancholy, As he is
very potent with such spirits, Abuses me to damn me. (2. 2. 433-438)

Empty Existence: Time and again, Hamlet bemoans the uselessness and emptiness of life. He would kill himself if his conscience would let him. He considers taking his life, as his "To be, or not to be" soliloquy" reveals. But as a Roman Catholic, he cannot go against the tenets of his religion, which forbids suicide.