

# Hamlet the rest is silence english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



This essay shall be providing an insight into how I would stage William Shakespeare's Hamlet. I shall discuss how I would portray vital characters such as Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, and Ophelia. Finally, I shall discuss which themes and scenes I feel are most important as well as those I would leave out. I feel as though the play is best when in its original setting and time period, although I would leave this quite vague in the play. A modern day adaption would mean certain aspects would have to be lost, such as the players, and authorities such as the police would surely be involved. What is important for me is the character's themselves, how they interact with one another as well as how we see them portrayed when alone. I would include many of the characters as seen in Shakespeare's original play; however I would not include the character of Guildenstern, instead combining his words with Rosencrantz's. I feel as though there is not a real purpose for the two of them, instead if Hamlet only had one school friend, the betrayal of them taking sides with the King would be even greater, which would further aid to Hamlet's feeling of being alone and his portrayal of madness may be more extreme. I feel as though the setting would still resonate with modern audiences as it is such a classic play it does not need to conform to a large modern day theatrical transformation. I would use a regular stage facing only small audiences at the time, with the backdrop of a dark castle, each scene in a different dimly lit room. The empty space of the stage would allow the action to flow and offer no clutter as distractions. Props would be brought on as needed, such as a bed wheeled on for the scene in Gertrude's chamber, or thrones for the royals to sit on. The characters would leave the stage and walk through the audience in order to create closer connections. During the

fight scenes the actors would leave the stage and run amongst the rows. For the ghost scene at the start, spotlights would be used to focus on each of the characters as they talk, to create a spooky atmosphere for the audience. The ghost's speeches would be echoed with the sound of drums, and he would be hazily lit by spotlight at all times. The themes of madness, death, alienation and revenge are the three I would also focus upon. The tragedy of Hamlet is 'a prolonged meditation on self-destruction, haunted by the shade of a dead father, transfixed by the image of a drowned, innocent woman'. [1] The death scene of Ophelia will have the same eerie feel and quiet music as is played whenever the ghost appears in order to link the two together. Hamlet's alienation is easily portrayed through the language and speeches made, so to aid this I would make a point of including all the scenes in which Hamlet is talked about, as well as often showing him alone on stage only to then walk away when other characters appear. Finally, the theme of revenge involves Hamlet vowing to kill Claudius to avenge his father, and then by Laertes who goes after Hamlet when he has stabbed Polonius. I would use the colour red to visually portray the anger these characters feel, such as red lighting, or having the characters holding or wearing red items. In Hamlet, there are a few characters whose characterization depends on the production itself, such as the character of Ophelia. She could be portrayed as the sweet, innocent and naive young girl many see her as, or the focus could shift to see her backtalk Polonius just like Hamlet does, as well as how she keeps up with Hamlet in his wordplay. I feel it would be interesting to have her portrayed as being strong and true to herself in the beginning. Then the audience could judge for themselves if she was socially ambitious or truly in love with

Hamlet. This way, once she begins to go mad, it would create an even bigger impact to the audience, with her death shown in a dramatic dance-like performance by the actors of her falling into the river. Her death scene would be acted whilst Gertrude stands in the corner of the stage with Claudius and Laertes. A visual example is shown on Visual Page 3. A backdrop would show Ophelia in the castle grounds, and there would be dancers on stage acting as the Willow tree and other parts of the garden. They would also be visual embodiments of the demons that haunt her. Alongside the actors playing out this scene, Gertrude would tell of how Ophelia fell to her death; 'There is a willow grows askant the brook That shows his hoary leaves in the glassy stream.[...] There on the pendent boughs her crownet weeds Clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke, When down her weedy trophies and herself fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide and mermaid-like awhile they bore her up'. [2] With reference to costume, I would keep the royalty lavishly dressed with Gertrude for instance always looking regal. However, Hamlet would always be wearing black or grey clothes, to further portray his solemn mood and outlook. I would not make the time period specific, the clothing would be plain shirts and trousers for the males, uniforms for the guards and loose dresses for the women. Hamlet would always wear dark colours as he tries to sneak around in the background unlike Gertrude, as shown in Visual Page 2. Claudius too would wear extravagant clothing to show his richness and power. He would wear red and gold like his wife, colours that are associated with wealth and sexuality. My interpretation of the play is that Hamlet should always be the focus, as he is eponymous lead after all. With this in mind, I would always have the actor present on stage,

whether we see him in the background or off to the side caught up in his own mind. He is always resonating in the other character's minds, so I would want this too to happen with the audience. In order to portray the character of Hamlet, I would take inspiration from how the actor David Tennant played him. The guardian described his performance as 'A japester who pushed himself squealing along on a caster chair, a young man sunk in a melancholy dream and a prince of parody, a compulsive mimic who kept becoming someone other than himself. This was a Hamlet who continually played with the idea that wit can look like witlessness'.<sup>[3]</sup>In my own reading of Hamlet it is his wit and sarcasm that draws me to the character so that is what I would look for when seeing the play acted out. Visual Pages 1 and 4 give further examples of how I would have Hamlet portrayed. Harold Bloom makes an interesting point about the character of Hamlet, of how he 'is a hero who pragmatically can be regarded as a villain: cold, murderous, solipsistic, nihilistic, manipulative'.<sup>[4]</sup>This is important when we look at Hamlet's relationship with Ophelia for instance. He treats her terribly, acting cold towards her knowing she cares about him. He has this attitude with all women it seems, especially with his mother. Her hasty marriage to his uncle turns him against her, and he spends much of the play trying to make her see what a terrible deed she has done. He is manipulative in the way that he acts mad with no regard for those who care about him as he is solely focused on proving Claudius's guilt. Hamlet and Claudius are constantly at odds with each other, both plotting ways to find out what they need from the other. Hamlet is desperate to avenge his father, whilst Claudius is trying to discover the reason for Hamlet's supposed madness. He wants Hamlet dead, but will

not kill him himself, instead manipulates Laertes to carry out the deed after the accidental death of his father. With regards to Hamlet having attributes of a typical villain, Claudius represents the worst in human nature, with his greed, lust and corruption. He cannot refrain from indulging in his human desires, and always is focusing on how to keep maintaining his power. Claudius in private appears to be apprehensive, anxious and confused, such as in the scene whereby Hamlet goes to kill him but finds Claudius praying. This would have been the ideal moment for Hamlet to avenge his father, but he wants Claudius to pay for the murder and he believes by praying Claudius may go to heaven instead. I would put a lot of effort into showing the relationships between the characters. Hamlet no longer cares for Ophelia in the same way since his mother's remarriage so this would be shown by him acting on edge whenever around her, and being distracted by other things when she talks to him. The play does have a certain focus on human relationships, and these two characters show how easily relationships can carelessly be thrown away. The relationship between Claudius and Gertrude is what originally causes for Hamlet's sullen demeanour. They act loved up in the opening scene but throughout the play I would have them grow distant from each other as their own problems begin to take control of their lives. Whilst I enjoy the comedy of Hamlet, with Hamlet's speeches and treatment of others, I would leave out the character of Osric. He is only a minor character and does not have a purpose in the type of play I would set. Hamlet takes particular delight in plaguing Polonius with his sarcasm and nonsense. When Polonius comes to him, asking if Hamlet know who he is, Hamlet quickly retorts: 'Excellent well; you are a fishmonger'.<sup>[5]</sup>This type of

jeering humor is very similar to that with which he treats Osric in Shakespeare's play so I would leave out the character and instead solely focus Hamlet's wit onto Polonius. The final scenes in which Gertrude, Claudius, Laertes and Hamlet die, would give an explosive ending. There would be a large number of actors on stage, with members of the court being present. These actors however would blend into the background and numbers would get smaller so the focus can remain on the action on stage. The character of Fortinbras would not appear, so the play ends with Hamlet dying beside Horatio. The last lines of the play would be from Horatio; ' Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince, And flights of angels sing thee to thy death'.<sup>[6]</sup>The stage would fade into darkness, to show the death of Hamlet has brought a sense of obscurity to all. To summarise, I would keep an overall traditional take on William Shakespeare's Hamlet, following the same order of events and ending with Hamlet's tragic death. The themes of alienation, revenge and death would resonate strongly throughout the play, with atmospheric theatrical elements of spotlights, dance and sound effects. Madness would affect Hamlet and Ophelia, who would act over the top to show the differences from the sane characters. Claudius's guilt would be his downfall, and Gertrude would remain ever caring for her son.