

Shakespeare's hamlet

Literature



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Shakespeare's Hamlet: Polonius. Polonius is a babbling fool. He has a certain style of talking which could be described as "wordy" or even "pompous" as can be seen when he says to Queen Gertrude and King Claudius: "Why day is day, night night, and time is time,/Were nothing but to waste night, day, and time..." (Act II, Scene 2, 89-90). He claims that "brevity is the soul of wit" (Act II, Scene 2, 91) and says he will be brief, but he seems not to be aware that his rambling talk is the opposite of witty and brief. The Queen seems to make fun of him when she replies "More matter with less art" (Act II, Scene 2, 97) and this makes Polonius appear to be foolish and a bit ridiculous. This impression is confirmed in the small speech at the end of this scene when he recites all the different kinds of actors such as "tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical etc" (Act II, Scene 2, 397-404). He is not exactly lovable, but he is not a villain either. He lacks self-awareness, and this makes us pity him.

Polonius seems very eager to please the royal couple, and asks for reassurance when he says to King Claudius "What do you think of me?" (Act II, Scene 2, 130). He appears to be a good father, showing concern for his children but at the same time he gets involved in stalking them and trying to manipulate events in order to gain favour with the King and Queen. His intentions are probably good, but he is incompetent and full of his own importance, which means that Hamlet is correct in his parting remark to Polonius: "These tedious old fools!" (Act II, Scene 2, 221)

Reference

Shakespeare, William. Hamlet, in Complete Works, edited by J. Jowett et al. Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 2005, pp. 681-718.