

Irony in hamlet

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Irony In Hamlet One of the most useful motifs in Shakespeare's Hamlet is the use of irony. Harry Levin's "Irony in Hamlet" explains that ironic commentary is a technique that reinforces the poetic justice of the work. Our first impression of Hamlet is derived at the gathering in the courtyard, dressed in black for his deceased father. He has a melancholic demeanor about him and he is kept to himself. His first words say that Claudius is "A little more than kin and less than kind," (Shakespeare 13) indicating a contrast in values between the new king and himself, thus, in a sense, designating himself to the position of an outcast. Ironically, the one who least wants to be part of the world at this despairing time, must engage himself fully with the world in order to validate the ghost's accusation and then carry out his wish. Claudius is a very ironic character. Claudius is first revealed to the audience in an effectively glorified state. He ceremoniously enters the stage as the recently crowned king of Denmark, and regally addresses his people. Passionately maintaining the claim that although the memory of his brother Hamlet, the recently deceased king, is still painful, he has a vital obligation to assume the throne. The kingdom has appropriately mourned King Hamlet's loss, and it is time to embrace Claudius' potent leadership. Within the first few lines of his speech, Claudius cunningly pays lip service to the beloved King Hamlet, while effectively promoting his own, apparently compassionate image. It is apparent that Claudius is immensely contented with his new responsibility. When Claudius mentions using "an auspicious and a drooping eye" (Shakespeare 11), he would have his followers believe that he views the current situation with both remorse and hopefulness. However, in an act of verbal irony, Claudius' statement also

refers to his two-faced nature. The elder Hamlet of whom Claudius so lovingly speaks is the victim of Claudius' murderous nature. Therefore, it is with unparalleled audacity that Claudius attempts to simulate the rhetoric of a noble king. The irony of the hero's delay is apparent when the prince passes Claudius kneeling in prayer in the chapel, but refrains from killing him because the king's soul might go straight to heaven. Now might I do it pat, now he is praying; And now I'll do't. And so he goes to heaven; And so am I revenged. That would be scann'd: A villain kills my father; and for that, I, his sole son, do this same villain send To heaven. (Shakespeare 76) The hero continues on to his mother's room, who is so upset by her son's words that she is at the verge of an emotional breakdown. While conversing with her, the very emotionally upset Hamlet detects a spy (Polonius) behind the curtain, and stabs him with his sword, thinking he is the King. This is ironic since Hamlet had just passed by the praying Claudius while on his way to his mother's room, and his inability to act previously. The killing of Polonius, and the fact that Hamlet knows of his wrong-doing, causes Claudius to send the Prince to England where the hero will be put to death. Hamlet, despairing at his inability to execute his father's wish, laments the obstacles to his revenge: How all occasions do inform against me, And spur my dull revenge! What is a man, If his chief good and market of his time Be but to sleep and feed? (Shakespeare 91) The irony in the conclusion of the play is profound. Claudius, who has arranged the fencing match with Laertes in order to kill Hamlet, is himself murdered along with the Queen. Also, an ironic parallel between Laertes and Hamlet comes to light. Both are requested by their fathers to get revenge in their name, and both succeed. Laertes is killed by

the poison that Claudius has intended for Hamlet, and so does Gertrude. Hamlet gets his revenge by stabbing Claudius with the poisoned sword, and forcing him to drink the rest of the poison from the cup. The last scene is most ironic. Hamlet has avenged his father, who had given his life to defend his kingdom. In the end, however, Hamlet Sr.'s life work has been a waste considering his archenemies, the Fortinbras, come to inherit the throne of Denmark. Total WORKS CITED Levin, Harry. " Irony in Hamlet." Hamlet. 1st ed. New York: W. W. Norton and, 2011. 271-81 Shakespeare, William. " Hamlet." Hamlet. 1st ed. New York: W. W. Norton and, 2011. 5-130