

English Advanced Notes

Module B – Critical Study of Texts

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Abstract

Hamlet is a schizophrenic. He is impulsive, paranoid, and experiences auditory hallucinations. He also happens to be the sanest person in the entire play. Hamlet understands and seeks to remedy the many problems that threaten a dystopic Denmark. Educated to be a humanist following the Renaissance movement, he is appalled by the inequality created by a medieval hierarchy and the increasing disconnection between political leaders and the people. However, as Prince of Denmark, Hamlet has too much of the old medieval world within him. Throughout the play, he is conflicted between the two ideologies. His understanding of cultural/moral relativism forces him to acknowledge that any action he commits will compromise either of the principles he is torn between. As events unfold, Hamlet's contemplation on the philosophy of mankind eventually leads him to reject the old paradigms, and exact vigilante justice on Claudius, causing a power struggle between two ideologies.

- At face value, Hamlet explores the struggle for revenge, between doing what is expected and what is right
- Play is commonly viewed as the inability of Hamlet to carry out what is expected of him, killing Claudius to avenge his father's death
- However it explores much more significant and deeper ideas of life and death, using Hamlet's struggle as a means to do so;
- Hamlet is experiencing a disconnection with the people around him
- Searching for meaning in life and then in death, where there is in fact no meaning to be found
- Causes him to be disillusioned to the point where life no longer has any meaning

The Context

- Traditional context – Elizabethan Times (1600)
- Shakespearean English spoken by people wearing modern clothes loses believability and credibility.
- Easier for audiences to objectively identify and deal with a society's flaws that is not your own.

Theme 1 - Dystopian Denmark

- Denmark is a corrupted, decaying state under Claudius' tyranny. This atmosphere of suspicion should be established at the start of the play. (Disillusionment of Hamlet has its basis in the corruption of the court)
- **"Who's there"** foreshadows the suspicion and questioning that will continue throughout
- the composer's use of the iambic pentameter flexibly, often using enjambment to reflect, even in the script, the chaos and disorder of the world (Andrews and Gibson)
- Even people occupying the highest positions recognise this. Claudius himself knows that **In the corrupted currents of this world/Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice, and oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself/buys out the law** (III.iii.57-) and Laertes' advice to his sister is to **"live in constant fear"** and **"fear it"** I.iii.30-
- Francisco also highlights the corruption, stating **"I am sick at heart"**
- The inclusion of the supernatural in the ghost of old Hamlet and his several appearances highlights the discord → Horatio believes it foretells disaster for Denmark, **"this bodes some strange eruption to our state"**

- Corruption of the court in that a king has been killed and his brother taken the throne, with Hamlet believing it **“is not, or cannot come to good”**

Theme 2 - Spying Secrecy, and Manipulation

- As a direct consequence of the distrustful environment, the spying and secrecy has become commonplace in the court of Denmark, a common theme of dystopian societies.
- It is these constant spying that caused Hamlet, an important figure of the court, to become paranoid
- As one of the major themes of the play, the spying should be emphasized. In Act II Sc II, Claudius uses Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to **“draw [Hamlet] on...gather...glean”** information from him. (II.II.14-16), showing his manipulating powers, which he uses on almost everyone in the court against Hamlet, including Laertes and Polonius.
- Hamlet will be initially pleased to see his good friends. This will be represented with Hamlet spreading his arms wide open with welcome and a pleasant, relaxed tone. However, as soon as he gets an unconvincing answer when he inquires the pair's motives (**what make you at Elsinore?** II.ii.256), he immediately shifts to a guarded, sceptical tone realising that he knows **“the good king and queen have sent for you** (II.II.266-7). His body tenses up and his hand rests on his scabbard, becoming paranoid.
- recurring imagery of infection and disease founds in lines such as **“Something is rotten in the state of Denmark”**
- Armed guards coupled with a dark interior setting conveys the tone of constriction and oppression, conveyed further through the lines **'We beseech you... to remain here in the cheer and comfort of our eye'**. Pervading notions of surveillance, the play can convey a stronger sense of a society ill at ease with itself, where the feeling is disjointed and apprehensive, which as Kenneth Branagh concluded, **“reinforce the idea of a looming national tragedy.”**

Language

Appearance vs. Reality

- Language is used by both Hamlet and Claudius as a means of manipulating those around them, suggesting the corruption of language itself, which adds to the overall corruption in the court.
- One of the central images in *Hamlet* is that of the ear being poisoned, both literally and metaphorically. While in the case of Hamlet's murdered father, the poison was inserted directly into the ear, the meaning is extended to include the power offered by words and language to manipulate and destroy. In essence, as the play progresses, words are the key to both the driving action of the play as well as its outcome as all characters have been affected by the poisoned word.
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- In Hamlet's exchange with Ophelia in which he directs **“get thee to a nunnery”**, it casts him as mad in Ophelia's eyes who states **“Oh what a noble mind here o'erthrown”**
- However Hamlet is astutely aware that Claudius is overhearing this conversation, so that his seemingly mad words have meaning for Claudius → **“I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thought to put them in”**, constitutes a threat
- Claudius acknowledges Hamlet's guide of words in saying, **“what he spake, though**

it lacked form a little, was not like madness”

Language of theatre and Acting

- Works to further develop the idea of appearance vs. Reality and the corruption of falsehoods in the court
- Hamlet wonders at the players ability to weep for a fictional character, and the power of acting → **“in a fiction, in a dream of passion, could force his soul so to his own conceit”**
- Hamlet makes use of a fictitious play to reveal truth, highlighting the power of appearance → **“the play’s the thing wherein ill catch the conscience of the king”**

Theme 3 - Character of Hamlet

- He is histrionic! As a young man educated at the **“school in Wittenberg (I.II.113)”**, he has adopted a completely new set of ideas and values. He values rationality, true to the Renaissance humanist teachings at the University. Hamlet believes that in the face of an apparently meaningless world, people have to make rational decisions and be responsible for themselves and not just blindly following tradition, claiming **“it is a custom/more honoured in the breach than the observance”**
- First Soliloquy → In a passionate speech whose broken syntax conveys the character’s mental disturbance, he sees the world as a neglected garden grown foul (II.135-7), and portrays his father as a god compared to the bestial and lecherous Claudius (II.151-2).
- Unusual thinking doesn't mean losing all sense. It means losing common sense, which is defined by society, and thus differs between communities. This is why many characters interprets Hamlet's thoughts and actions, which are different to theirs, as mad and the reason Hamlet is mad in the context of the play, but not quite in ours. He suffers the stigma associated with his schizophrenia, and his insights and revelations largely ignored and dismissed as madness. As Polonius noted **“Though this be madness, yet there is method in't II.ii.200)** This difference can be shown with Hamlet wearing plain clothes of the common people whilst the courtiers wear pompous, elaborate clothes, signalling the huge social inequality between the upper and lower classes.
- The protagonist of a dystopic society intuitively sense something is terribly wrong. For Hamlet, his **'prophetic soul's'** intuition that 'the time is out of joint' is confirmed by the ghost, which acts as his conscience, prompting him to seek further proof, which he eventually finds.
- The ghost's presence is confirmed by three eyewitnesses. However it is only confirmed visually. A significant symptom of schizophrenia is auditory hallucinations. Hamlet was alone when he hears what the ghost has to say, thus his interaction with this 'ghost' can be symbolically seen as psychomachia – a battle of his soul, the conflict of the mind.
- Hamlet is the most skilled of all at rhetoric. He uses highly developed metaphors. In contrast, when occasion demands, he is precise and straightforward, as when he explains his inward emotion to his mother. At times, he relies heavily on puns to express his true thoughts while simultaneously concealing them. His very first words in the play are a pun; when Claudius addresses him as **“my cousin Hamlet, and my son,”** Hamlet says as an aside, **“A little more than kin and less than kind .”**
- Pauline Kiernan argues that Shakespeare changed English drama forever in *Hamlet* because he **“showed how a character’s language can often be saying several things at once, and contradictor meanings at that, to reflect fragmented thoughts and disturbed feelings.”** She gives the example of Hamlet’s advice to Ophelia, **“Get thee to a nunnery,”** which is

simultaneously a reference to a place of chastity and a slang term for a brothel, reflecting Hamlet's confused feelings about female sexuality.

Theme 4 -Ideology Conflict

- The psychomachia Hamlet experiences is one between two ideologies – the humanism he embraces and the medieval tradition he is bound by. Although he subscribes to the principle of humanist rationality, he still possess some superstition marked by his belief in the ghost and believes in the medieval religious taboos of suicide.
- The ghost's injunction to “**revenge [Old Hamlet's] foul and most unnatural murder** (I.V.25)” but “**Taint not thy mind** (I.V.85) highlights the conflict Hamlet experiences. Hamlet, subscribing to the moral relativism of humanism acknowledges that there is no way he could accomplish this without compromising either of the principles he is torn between. From a medieval perspective, avenging his father's death by deposing a despot is acceptable, but his humanist ways affirms the worth and dignity of all life. He is thus paralysed by the two conflicting views, unable to act.
- The protagonist of dystopic fiction is usually presented with a chance to escape or overturn the social order. Here, Hamlet has both options.
- Hamlet's soliloquy's follow parts of the play with intense dramatic tension, such as the ghost's return to prompt Hamlet to action, Hamlet contemplating killing Claudius whilst playing and the preparations for battle on the coast → allow Hamlet to deliver his truthful thoughts and feelings on the moments, which highlights the motivations for his actions
- For example his soliloquy in Act 3 Sc 1 is the first indication of his total disillusionment with the world, where he questions why anyone would continue with life when death seems to be more a sensible option → “**For who would bear the whips and scorns of time...when he himself might his quietes make a bare bodkin**”
- In one of Shakespeare's most famous soliloquies, “**To be or not to be?**”, Hamlet contemplates two courses and which is nobler. The first one is 'to be' and go on living, accepting the tribulations of life and “**in the mind to suffer**” - (either he doesn't kill Claudius and have to live with knowledge of the murderer ruling over him, or he kills Claudius and has to live with killing his monarch). The second option 'not to be' relates to opposing “**against a sea of troubles**”, indicating Hamlet is considering suicide, the only way to escape the dystopian society.
- He resolves this conflict when he realised whether he kills the Claudius or not, Denmark will continue to be a “**prison**” and a place of suffering for him (II.ii.234,240), but not for the citizens.
- He understands that the ultimate consequence – death - is inevitable for everyone, yet we are different in life. He concludes that we must make the most out of our lives as “**the very conveyances of [a landlord] of his lands will scarcely lie in [a coffin]**”, and sees Claudius and his dystopian rule as a threat to this.
- Thus Hamlet decides “**to be**” and try to transform what he perceives to be a chaotic, corrupted Denmark with his new humanist principles by killing Claudius in an act of vigilante justice.
- This soliloquy is one of the most dramatic moments and should definitely be emphasised. The whole set should be dark, with just a spot light focusing on Hamlet as he grapples with his conflict. As this reading concerns the ideological battle symbolised by the struggle between Claudius and Hamlet, the two characters will be emphasised visually by wearing crowns.
- The rapidness with which death occurs at the end is in stark contrast to the previous acts where killing involved lengthy consideration as well as the 'messy' nature in which it occurs

→ suggests the futility of life in that no one escapes death, with most of the deaths meaningless

- Rapid killing off highlights the total destruction and devastation of the corruption, and the imbalance of natural order → what Hamlet has been saying throughout, life is futile.
- Hamlet makes a last attempt to create meaning in this death, calling on Horatio **“in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain to tell my story”** so that this **“wounded name”** can be cleared

Characterisation

- The characterisation of Hamlet is central to the reading of the play
- Hamlet is not indeed mad, simply choosing to **‘put an antic disposition on’** as a means to navigate the complexity of the world around him
- He holds a depressing view of the world, considering it too to be **‘weary, stale, flat and unprofitable’**
- He is trying to find meaning in life and death, considering death and its consequences → **“the dread of the something after death, the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns”** makes us **“beat those ills we have”** → bleak view on life
- Refrains from killing Claudius in moment of prayer as **“now is praying, and now i’ll do’t – and so a goes to heaven”**, instead choosing a moment when there is **“no relish of salvation in’t”**

Key Relationships

Hamlet and Claudius

- Hamlet’s first soliloquy is vital in conveying his disgust at how quickly his mother remarried → his anger at **the “incestuous sheets”** and Claudius’s invasion of a nuclear family
- When the ghost reveals Claudius as the father’s murderer, Hamlet exclaims; **“o my prophetic soul”** suggesting he had already suspected his uncle of foul play → delays killing of Claudius. O’Toole says its because he is a perfectionist and not the right moment
- **“Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet to give these mourning duties to your father...but to preserve in obstinate condolment is a course of impious stubbornness..tis unmanly to grief”** → bitter relationship from the beginning
- **“Think of us as a father”** → appearance vs. Reality says the man whom then tries to murder Hamlet → motives questionable → secure the throne

Hamlet and Horatio

- **“Indeed my lord, it followed hard upon”** → share same views on actions of G
- Horatio is not afraid to share sensitive knowledge with Hamlet → Hamlet first found out about the ghost from Horatio
- **“How strange or off some ‘er I bear myself..to put an antic disposition on”** → entrusts only him and Marcellus that he is only acting crazy
- Horatio is dependent on Hamlet and even tries to kill him upon Hamlet’s death. Hamlet treats Horatio as his legacy, a person to pass his message on.

Hamlet and Gertrude

- Relationship is strained and highly formal, seems to represent a queen and her subject → Hamlet pledges to her refers to her as **“madam”** → **“I shall in all my best obey you madam”**
- Not the case, does not feel any connection towards his mother and has lost all respect for

her. Both try to gain control over the other with Hamlet succeeding using both physical domination and verbal wit. **“Come, come, and sit down, you shall not budge. Where you may see the inmost part of you”**

- Gertrude tries to understand the change in Hamlet’s behaviour, doesn’t know what to do. He now disrespects her. Submissive and passive nature of Gertrude. Can’t stand to hear what else he has to say...**“Oh Hamlet speak no more...thou hast turned my eyes into my very soul ... and there I see such black and grained spots”**
- However love for his mother → **“I will speak daggers for her, but use none”** → delays his vengeance for killing Claudius

Textual Integrity:

The unity of a text; its coherent use of form and language to produce an integrated whole in terms of meaning and value. Textual integrity is the notion that the text can stand alone as a piece of work, regardless of the text’s paradigms; its social and theoretical practice and its ability to be understood without reference.

Arguably, because of the deep understanding of Shakespeare’s context necessary for the comprehension of the overall play, it is not unified and cannot stand alone. Similarly, the complexity of the plot and language render the play incomprehensible to many.

On the other hand, the universal, transcendental themes explored make the text able to be understood to some extent in different contexts.

Attraction to a Modern Audience and Other Readings (CAN ADD OTHER READINGS IN DAY 2)

I realise there is fierce competition from Olivier and Fintan O’Toole’s readings, but they are now outdated in our changing society.

Fintan O’Toole’s reading is similar to mine – portraying Hamlet as a young man living in a society by ‘another set of principles’. We do however, disagree on a pivotal point. I believe Hamlet’s humanist nature draws him to encourage living life the best we can, contrasting O’Toole’s view that he wants to have a romanticised, ordered, meaningful death. O’Toole’s view is inconsistent with humanism because it deals with the sanctity of human life, not dignity of death. But then again, amidst the consumerist world of the 80s he lived in, he would have a good point. He argues that Hamlet’s constant discourse of death ‘blurs the line between life and death’. I contend that it is exactly because he understands the inevitability of death that he values life so much.

Olivier’s Hamlet’s Oedipal complex may be sensationalist, but the objectification of women is now politically and socially incorrect, and is inconsiderate to the modern female. The battle of wits with Claudius – with Hamlet feigning madness to manipulate – is great against the backdrop of the cold war, when the film was made. It is a symbolic struggle relevant to the US and USSR’s covert war. However, this spying and secrecy is precisely what the modern audience have growing discontent with. We are tired of the lack of accountability of governments and corporations today, and angered that when two politicians/businessmen battle, the common populace will invariably suffer. This audience will appreciate Hamlet’s frankness and reason in the face of such an atmosphere of suspicion, and empathise with his paranoid schizophrenia – blaming the dystopian rule of Claudius. The fact that Hamlet is labelled mad by the court reflects the growing disconnection between large political and economic institutions and the people. Hamlet dared to take a step to overturn this travesty of a society. He died on the cusp of the overthrowing of the social hierarchy to free his people.

Example Band 6 Essay

It has been said by critics that Shakespeare's dramatic play 'Hamlet' deals with a son who has an inability to carry out what is expected of him, and avenge his father's death. And at face value, this holds true. However, 'Hamlet' explores much more deep and significant issues of vengeance and families using key relationships, themes and characters within the play to do so. Sarah Frater said of her criticism of a 2008 production of 'Hamlet' that "the fraught family connections are key themes in Hamlet...[and] without it the play is incomprehensible." Both families within the play show moments of advice however also show signs of being dysfunctional families. It is this key idea of seeing Hamlet as a family-based drama that you must base your production around as this family theme shows a consideration of the existential questions and thus is where the strength in the play lies. The content, language and construction of the text are all used to develop and advance these thematic ideas.

'Hamlet' explores this idea of a tragic hero; however, some critics view the 'real tragedy' of the play as Polonius's family whose deaths are all a result of manipulation of the royal family. Feminist Catherine Stimpson suggests that Polonius is "seemingly manipulative" and "plays games and sets traps". However Polonius is rather a man of his circumstances for while he does show deceitfulness when dealing with Hamlet, it only because he is carrying out Claudius's plans through irony; "Madness in great ones must not unwatched go." When Hamlet stabs Polonius (Act 2, Sc 4) he states, "Thou, wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell! I took thee for thy better", it highlights how Polonius, man unaware of the nature of the situation he is in is killed by the royalty through one of their schemes. And this is what you must foreshadow within your production, this motif of the fatality of loyalty, which commonly occurs through Polonius's family and leads to the tragic downfall of each. Ophelia's tragic death will be discussed later. Claudius's use of rhetorical, nerve hitting questions to Laertes in; "Laertes, was your father dear to you? Or are you like the painting of a sorrow, a face without a heart?". Claudius's manipulative nature essentially drives already angry Laertes to attempt to murder Hamlet, only to lose his own life. The theme of fatality of loyalty and this idea of familial vengeance is foreshadowed within Laertes death and due to its circumstances, is a part of the "real tragedy" of the play.

Another key theme, which must be foreshadowed within your production and is a key aspect of this familial drama, is the relationship between Hamlet and his 'two fathers'. Within this, key themes of appearance vs. Reality, the supernatural, fatherly advice and death/decay imagery is used. Hamlet's relationship with his dead father is the catalyst for all events that follow after and highlights this theme of the supernatural. Upon meeting Hamlet the ghost states, "revenge his foul and most unnatural murder...for the serpent that did sting thy father's life now wears his crown". Prince Hamlet from then on devotes himself to avenging his father's death (an idea of retributive justice), but because he is contemplative and thoughtful in nature, he delays, entering into a deep melancholy and apparent madness as suggested by the feminist Eileen Allman, "Hamlet is a man of who is vigorously mentally, penetrating in his observations, perceptive and keen". The power of such father relationships are thus highlighted as it could be said that Hamlet's need to adapt his own personality to be compatible with his father's motivates him to rewrite his play. The ghost changes Hamlet's way of thinking, and turns Hamlet into a philosophical being, always contemplating about death as seen through his soliloquy, 'to be or not to be'. This is further highlighted at the end of the play through the symbol of Yorick's skull, which ultimately represents the thematic ideas of death's inevitability and the disintegration of the human form. Thus overall highlighting how important this fatherly relationship was in terms of the events of the play. Hamlet's relationship with Claudius is dysfunctional from the start. The theme of appearance vs. Reality is highlighted through Claudius's speech; "we pray you throw to earth this unprevailing woe and think of us as a father." Claudius's idea of a 'fatherly relationship' is conveyed here as a

motivational tool for Hamlet to accept Claudius as the new ruler of Denmark, rather than an appropriate relationship in which Claudius should be caring for Hamlet. Throughout the play Hamlet is unhappy with his mother's incestuous marriage to his uncle, and thus their relationship while key within the context of this play never improves with Hamlet stating; "Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane...is thy union here?" when he is killed.

Although chaos was manifested by Claudius, it was fostered by Hamlet and resulted in consequences for all. The anarchy spread from the two unstable characters is reflected in the behaviour of the other characters and stimulated their downward spirals. Hamlet warns Horatio that he will act "strange or odd" in order "to put antic disposition on". The use of words such as "act" and "put on" allow Shakespeare to emphasise the notion that Hamlet chooses to pretend to be mad in order to advance his own ends, exposing Claudius' guilt.. Death and suicide are reoccurring motifs throughout the play, effectively demonstrated in Hamlet's iconic soliloquy, "To be or not to be". This rhetorical question further accentuates the ambiguity and chaos caused at the time due to the break in the Chain of Being. On the other hand, Hamlet explores contemporary issues through negative lexicons, such as "to grunt and sweat under a weary life".

The role of women within 'Hamlet expresses many of the contextual concerns of Shakespeare's time, especially the idea of a patriarchal family. This is especially seen through Hamlet's relationship with Gertrude. Feminist Debra Bergoffen presents a view that; "Gertrude demonstrates the way woman's complicity is essential to the patriarchal order as she provides a glimpse of a woman who steps outside it's parameters." This is indeed true as seen through the fact that (quote). However through the closet scene (Act 3, sc 4), Hamlet "re-inserts his mother into the patriarchal phallic order." Hamlet's hate for women in general is first highlighted within his first soliloquy, "frailty, thy name is woman". However, where does this come from? Kenneth Brannagh's production of Hamlet suggests that it comes from Hamlet being a sexually predatory figure, having ambiguously possessive feelings towards Gertrude. This is what I disagree with. Hamlet's misogynistic attitude throughout the play, for example his treatment of Ophelia in the 'nunnery scene' arises from his emotional response to a mother who has betrayed his feelings so painfully (quote). Furthermore as suggested by Stanton Kay, "Claudius's whoring" of Gertrude". Even though Hamlet lashes out at her with as much of his rage as possible, Gertrude remains faithful to him, protecting him from the King, . The true loyalties of any mother within a family, it seems, will lay first and fore mostly with her son.

Higher Band 6 Essay

Through its portrayal of human experience, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* reinforces the significance of loyalty. To what extent does your interpretation of *Hamlet* support this view? In your response, make detailed reference to the play.

Hamlet is a play as described by playwright Secca which is the quintessence of revenge tragedy, a play which celebrates the human condition, an exploration into the human experience in an inherently chaotic world. However, the text's relevance and input to its audience lies in the way one can gather alternative readings of the text that draw away from labelling it a revenge tragedy and allowing responders to explore the significance of other themes including; loyalty and disloyalty. Through Shakespeare's use of literary and dramatic devices, different forms of loyalty such as family loyalty, loyalty within marriage, loyalty between characters, national loyalty and personal loyalty are highlighted, and ultimately, Shakespeare endeavours to highlight the consequences of loyalty and disloyalty and its impact on ones humanity in an anarchistic society .

Denmark is presented as a dystopic nation where chaos, violence, secrecy and manipulation runs thick through the constructs of society due to political disloyalty, a setting which reflects Shakespeare's context, during the decline of dystopian Elizabethan England. This is evidenced through the composer's use of iambic pentameter flexibility and enjambment to reflect, even in the script, the chaos and disorder of the world (Andrews and Gibson), as highlighted in Francisco's metaphorical dialogue; "For this relief much thanks, 'tis bitter cold And I and sick at heart". This metaphor highlights a sense of malaise, prefiguring the tension to the ensuing tragedy, whilst the changing of the guard mirrors the tenuousness of the Political climate of Denmark, brought about by disloyalty between members within the court. The disloyalty exists so much to an extent whereby even character's occupying the highest positions recognises this, with Laertes' advising his sister to "live in constant fear" and "fear it". Furthermore, through the motif of disease as evidenced by the lines "*Something is rotten in the state of Denmark*", the composer's construction of such a dark and grim world suggests that consequences of disloyalty within a society constructs the human experience as one of suffering and torture.

Through the characters of Polonius and Horatio, Shakespeare highlights the powerful consequences of loyalty and disloyalty. Whilst Polonius's early disloyalty towards Laertes in asking Reynaldo to "inquire of his behavior...as may dishonor him", Polonius characterization creates him into a man bound by his circumstances, a character whom epitomizes the fatality of loyalty. When Polonius is summoned by Claudius to spy on Hamlet (Act 3, Scene 4), Polonius's loyalty nature accepts Claudius's demands, and as Hamlet's last words to Polonius suggest in; "Thou intruding fool, farewell! I took thee for thy better", Polonius was a man of good nature, nonetheless his loyalty as commissioner to the state brought about his tragic demise. Juxtaposing the fatality of loyalty and highlighting how loyalty has positive connotations, Horatio the almost epitome of loyalty through his devotion to Hamlet conveys this. This is evidenced by the Hamlet entrusting only him and Marcellus that he is putting on an antic disposition, "How strange or off some 'er I bear myself...to put an antic disposition on". Whilst Polonius develops into a loyal character, Horatio remains true and loyal, and thus remains one of the few to survive this play, indicating that true loyalty lies in an individual's ability to maintain their loyal nature, not in an individual whom selects where their loyalty lies.

Interestingly, the composer then twists this perspective on loyalty further during the lead up and the climax of the play, suggesting that while influential it might not have only positive consequences. Shakespeare uses of the play-within-a-play technique to show how Hamlet is now so consumed by the idea of revenge that he lost himself inside his own 'play' to an extent to where Hamlet's should becomes so disillusioned that he beliefs life to be futile and so seeks understanding in death, "for who could bear the whips and scorns of time...". A rare insight into how disloyalty to oneself can also lead to disastrous consequences. This version of the protagonist can be compared to his foil Laertes, whose own loyalty to his father causes him to challenge Hamlet to a duel to the death. The rash actions of Laertes in the memory of his father lead to his tragic death, while Horatio's unwavering obedience to Hamlet meant that he did not prevent his lord from falling. This use of irony, symbolized by the poisonous sword that kills both the wielder and the victim, highlights the paradoxical fallacies of being too loyal confronts responders who have up to this point viewed loyalty to be a desirable trait. Shakespeare then arranges the unexpected deaths of Gertrude and Claudius in quick succession, shocking responders and reiterating one last time that disloyalty will be paid for with the ultimate price.

The underlying theme of disloyalty is presented through Claudius and Hamlet's familial relationship through the symbolism of appearance and reality. Claudius's appearance of a loving, caring father is highlighted through the highly ironic, "think of us as your father". However when Hamlet "[catches] the conscience of the king]", Hamlet in essence has 'outplayed Claudius as Claudius slips up and reveals his manipulative and deceiving characteristics. This layering of

'acting' and 'playing' links to the themes of disloyalty and spying and surveillance, and the ultimate price is paid with Claudius's sudden, painful and dishonorable death, as a result of familial disloyalty at the climax of the play.

In conclusion, Shakespeare purposefully created an anarchistic world so that responders would be able to gain clearer insight into loyalty and the consequences of this characteristic. By constantly juxtaposing his characters throughout the plot, the composer demonstrates the inherent nature of loyalty and how it impacts upon all different types of personalities.