

William Shakespeare - Hamlet(1601)

PLOT

1st ACT: The king of Denmark dies

- The Queen marries her brother-in-law, Claudius, after two months

→
Claudius becomes king

- The ghost of the King appears → tells Hamlet he was poisoned by his brother asks his son to avenge him, but to spare his mother

2nd ACT: Hamlet pretends to be mad to carry out his plans more easily

- Polonius thinks that Hamlet's madness is caused by his love for his daughter, Ophelia
- Hamlet arranges a troupe of actors to perform *The Murder of Gonzago*, a story very similar to the one revealed by the ghost

3rd ACT: Play: the King rushes away, thus showing he is upset

- Hamlet kills Polonius, hidden behind the curtains during a conversation with his mother
- The king decides to send Hamlet away to get rid of him

4th ACT: Hamlet is sent to England

- Ophelia goes mad and drowns herself
- Laertes, Ophelia's brother, wants revenge
- Hamlet escapes
- The king plots Hamlet's death in a duel with Laertes

5th ACT: The duel follows

- Hamlet is urged to drink a poisoned drink but does not
- The Queen drinks the poisoned wine → dies
- Hamlet is wounded with the poisoned tip of Laertes' sword
- Swords are exchanged
- Hamlet wounds Laertes with the poisoned sword: Laertes dies
- Hamlet kills the King
- Before dying, Hamlet asks Horatio to tell his story, recommending that Fortinbras, prince of Norway, be elected king
- Fortinbras enters and becomes king; Military honours to Hamlet

THEMES: It could be considered as a revenge tragedy.

- Relationship between father and son, mother and son, Hamlet and his friends
- Love relationship
- Relation between appearance and reality (all that man knows is that he exists)
- Madness: Hamlet's fake madness (appearance) and Ophelia's (reality)
- The meaning of the theatre itself
- Doubt, Action and inaction
- The existence of God; Life and death; Peace of the soul
- Melancholy
- The corruption linked to power
- The concept of man's complex nature
- Honour and honourable action
- Loss of faith in the effectiveness of man's action + Crisis of human conscience
- Reasoned actions, not emotional
- Justice

HAMLET'S AMBIGUITY:

Hamlet is considered by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan an ambiguous character. Everything he says is conveyed through metaphor, simile and wordplay. The hidden meaning surpasses the apparent meaning. Hamlet himself is aware of the ambiguous nature of his own speeches as well as of the feelings which drive them.

A PLAY WITHIN THE PLAY:

In the third act there is play within the play, an interesting expedient which turns the actors into audience: there is a real audience, then there is an audience on stage composed of the actors of the play, who see a play, *The Murder of Gonzago*. The murder on stage (appearance) is more true than the murder hidden by the king (reality).