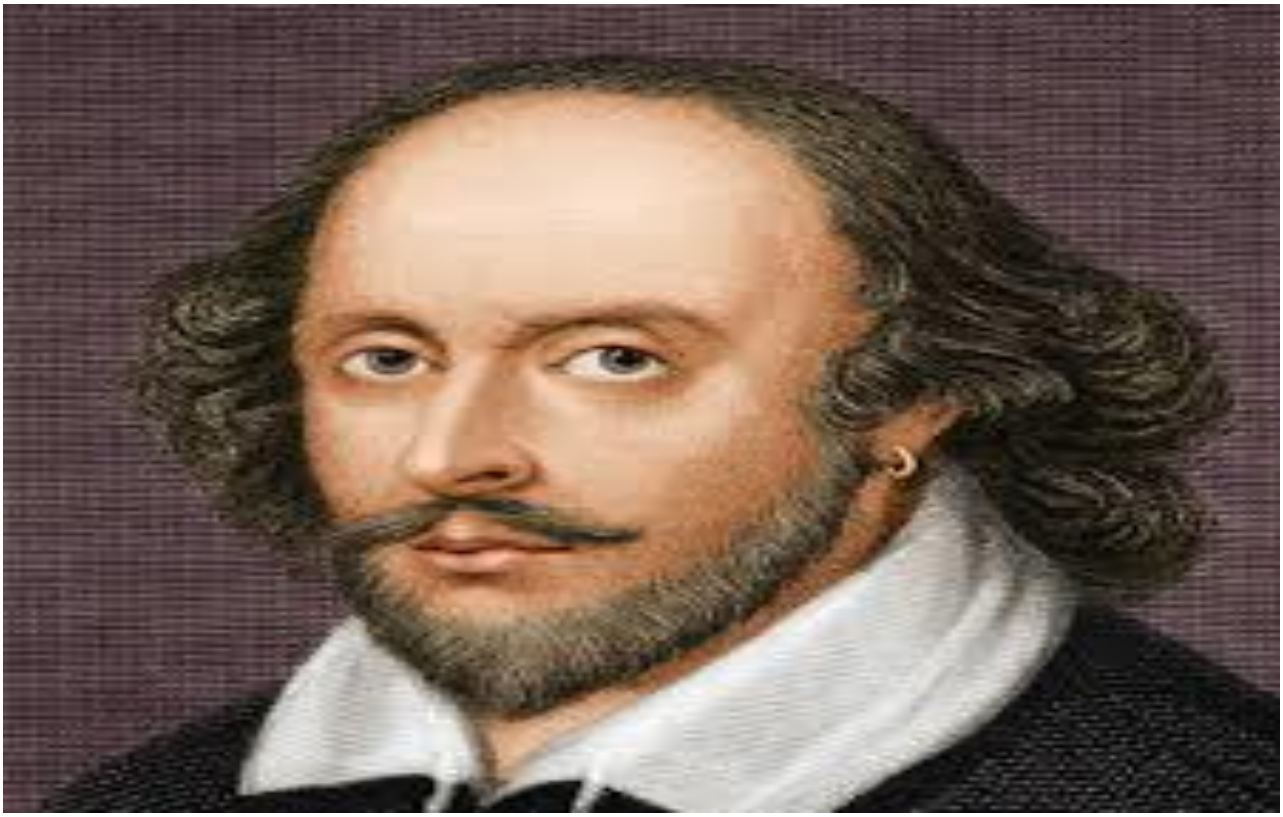
The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

"Hamlet"

A Tragedy Play

1599-1602

William Shakespeare



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William Shakespeare | Biography

William Shakespeare's birthday is traditionally celebrated on April 23, although there are no records of his birth. The closest researchers have is a baptismal record from Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, dated April 26, 1564. His 38 plays were likely written between the late 1580s and 1613.

Marriage records show that 18-year-old William married 26-year-old Anne Hathaway in November 1582. The following year, Anne gave birth to the first of their children, Susanna. Twins Judith and Hamnet were born in 1585. Tragically, Hamnet—Shakespeare's only son—died in 1596 at age 11.

Critics such as Edward Dowden and Samuel Taylor Coleridge believed that events in Shakespeare's life influenced the writing of *Hamlet*. In particular, they point to the deaths of his father in 1601 and of his son, whose name some intimate is an alternate spelling of Hamlet.

Whether Shakespeare's grief for his dead father and son found an outlet in the writing of *Hamlet*, one pivotal piece of the drama is very likely based on a historical incident. Claudius's poisoning of King Hamlet by pouring a vial of "cursed hebona" into his ear and Hamlet's rewrite of *The Murder of Gonzago* both echo the 1538 murder of Italy's Francesco Maria Della Rovere, Duke of Urbino. Marquis Luigi Gonzaga, jealous of the duke's social status, persuaded the duke's barber to kill his employer by dripping poison into his ear. The dramatic nature of the crime helped the story spread throughout Europe and years later gave Shakespeare inspiration for *Hamlet's* plot.

Much of Shakespeare's life was spent in either Stratford or London. His childhood, early married life, and later years were centered in Stratford, but his theatrical life was based in London.

By 1592 he had established himself in London and found success as both actor and playwright with the company Lord Strange's Men. During the plague outbreaks that shut down many public theaters, Shakespeare joined a new company, Lord Chamberlain's Men (later called the King's Men). This company was one of two well-known London companies. The group performed primarily at the Globe Theater—often for Queen Elizabeth I and later for King James I. Eventually,

Shakespeare would own a share of the theater and would remain with both the company and the theater for the rest of his career.

Shakespeare died in April 1616. Some sources list the date as April 23, but others consider that date a guess, romanticized by the idea that he was born and died on the same day. More than four centuries later, his writing remains one of literature's greatest influences—read, performed, referenced, and enjoyed by people of all ages in countries all over the world.

King Hamlet (Father)

Prince Hamlet (Son)

King Fortinbras(Father)

Prince Fortinbras(Son)

Elsinore Castle -- Kronborg castle in real life

Play-Summary

Prince Hamlet of Denmark is devastated by the sudden death of his father, King Hamlet, and the swift remarriage of his mother, Queen Gertrude, to his uncle Claudius, who has taken the throne. Hamlet is further disturbed when he encounters the ghost of his father, who reveals that he was murdered by Claudius. The ghost urges Hamlet to avenge his death.

Hamlet feigns madness to investigate the truth, which leads to a series of tragic events. His erratic behavior alienates those around him, including Ophelia, whom he loves. Ophelia's father, Polonius, spies on Hamlet and is accidentally killed by him, leading to Ophelia's descent into madness and eventual death.

Claudius, fearful of Hamlet's intentions, plots to have him killed. A duel is arranged between Hamlet and Laertes, Ophelia's brother. The duel is a trap: Laertes' sword is poisoned, and Claudius prepares a poisoned drink. The duel results in the deaths of Laertes, Gertrude, Claudius, and Hamlet himself. In the end, Fortinbras of Norway arrives to find the Danish royal family dead, and he takes control of the kingdom.

Character List:

Hamlet: Prince of Denmark, Hamlet is deeply philosophical and troubled by his father's death and his mother's quick remarriage to his uncle. He is consumed by doubt and a desire for revenge against King Claudius, whom he suspects of murdering his father. His feigned madness and introspective nature lead to a complex struggle between action and inaction, ultimately contributing to his tragic downfall.

Claudius: The new King of Denmark and Hamlet's uncle, Claudius has usurped the throne by murdering his brother, the former king. His outwardly benevolent demeanor masks his guilt and ambition. Claudius is a shrewd politician, adept at manipulating others, but is tormented by his conscience. His scheming leads to a series of tragic events as he attempts to maintain his power.

Gertrude: Hamlet's mother and the Queen of Denmark, Gertrude marries Claudius shortly after her husband's death. Her hasty remarriage and apparent lack of grief trouble Hamlet. Although her motives are less clear, she is generally seen as a loving mother caught between conflicting loyalties. Her eventual realization of the corruption around her leads to her tragic end, exacerbated by her son's turmoil.

Polonius: The Lord Chamberlain of Denmark, Polonius is a pompous and meddling advisor to King Claudius. He is deeply involved in the court's affairs and is the father of Laertes and Ophelia. Polonius often engages in verbose and impractical advice, believing himself to be wiser than he is. His attempts to spy on Hamlet lead to his own death, illustrating his misguided nature.

Ophelia: The daughter of Polonius and sister to Laertes, Ophelia is a gentle and obedient young woman who is romantically involved with Hamlet. Her father's

manipulations and Hamlet's erratic behavior cause her great distress. Ophelia's descent into madness and her subsequent death, whether accidental or intentional, highlight the tragic consequences of the political and personal machinations around her.

Laertes: The son of Polonius and brother to Ophelia, Laertes is passionate and impulsive. He quickly returns to Denmark upon learning of his father's death, seeking vengeance against Hamlet. His quest for revenge contrasts with Hamlet's more philosophical approach. Laertes' role in the final duel, and his own death, are central to the play's climactic resolution.

Horatio: Hamlet's loyal friend and confidant, Horatio is a scholar who provides a rational counterpoint to Hamlet's emotional turmoil. He remains steadfastly supportive and grounded throughout the play. Horatio's role is crucial in the play's final moments as he survives the tragic events and is left to tell Hamlet's story, preserving the truth of the tragedy.

Act 1

Shakespeare's "Hamlet" sets the stage with the characters, setting, plot, and tone of this five-act tragedy. The play opens on the ramparts of Elsinore Castle in Denmark during a changing of the guard. The old king, Hamlet's father, has died. The king's brother Claudius has replaced him, stealing Hamlet's rightful place on the throne. He has already married Hamlet's mother.

The previous two nights, the guards had seen a silent ghost resembling Hamlet's dead father. They ask Hamlet's friend Horatio to watch on the third night, and he sees the ghost. Horatio convinces Hamlet to watch the next night. Hamlet confronts his father's ghost, who tells him that Claudius murdered him. The dreary tone and harsh setting contrasting with the revelry within the castle foretell of the tragedy that is to come.

Act 1, Scene 1

Setting:

The scene takes place on the battlements of Elsinore Castle in Denmark. It is cold and dark, reflecting the ominous atmosphere.

Characters:

1. **Francisco** - A sentry (guard) at the castle.
2. **Barnardo** - Another sentry, who relieves Francisco.
3. **Marcellus** - A guard who is with Barnardo.
4. **Horatio** - A scholar and friend of Prince Hamlet.
5. **The Ghost** - The spirit of the late King Hamlet, Prince Hamlet's father.

Summary of Act 1, Scene 1:

1. The Scene Opens:

- Francisco, a sentry, is on guard duty. Barnardo arrives to relieve him, and the two men exchange greetings. They discuss the cold and the strange events happening recently.

2. Appearance of the Ghost:

- Marcellus joins them. The guards talk about a ghost they have seen on previous nights, and they are anxious about its appearance. Horatio, a scholar and friend of Prince Hamlet, arrives and is skeptical about the ghost's existence.

3. The Ghost Appears:

- The ghost appears dressed in the armor of the late King Hamlet. Horatio and the guards are alarmed. Horatio tries to speak to the ghost, but it remains silent and eventually disappears. Horatio is troubled and concerned about what the ghost might signify.

4. Discussion of the Ghost:

- The guards and Horatio discuss the ghost's resemblance to the deceased King Hamlet and the current political situation. They speculate that the ghost might be a bad omen, as it appears during a time of unrest in Denmark. They reference the recent death of King Hamlet and the swift marriage of Queen Gertrude to King Claudius, his brother.

5. The Scene Ends:

The ghost's appearance has left them unsettled, and they decide to inform Prince Hamlet about the ghost, believing it might be significant for him.

Themes and Significance in Hamlet's play

1. Supernatural Elements:

In *Hamlet*, the ghost of King Hamlet catalyzes the action by revealing his murder and demanding revenge. This supernatural appearance underscores themes of uncertainty and the unknown, emphasizing the moral and existential dilemmas faced by Hamlet. The ghost's presence questions the boundaries between the living and the dead, reflecting Elizabethan anxieties about the afterlife and divine justice.

2. Political Unrest

Hamlet reflects political instability through the turmoil in Denmark's court. Claudius's usurpation of the throne disrupts the natural order, leading to a kingdom rife with corruption and deceit. This unrest mirrors the personal conflicts of Hamlet, amplifying themes of legitimacy, power, and the impact of political actions on individual lives and societal stability.

3. Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing in Hamlet intensifies the dramatic tension and underscores themes of inevitability and fate. The ghost's revelations hint at future events, while Hamlet's contemplations about death and revenge suggest the tragic outcome. This literary device creates a sense of foreboding and aligns the audience with Hamlet's sense of impending doom, enriching the play's tragic dimension. Horatio can't get it to speak but promises to tell Hamlet about the specter. The darkness and cold, coupled with the apparition, set a dire tone of calamity and dread for the remainder of the play.

Revenge

Revenge is a prominent theme in *Hamlet* and a catalyst to many events in the plot. Several characters seek revenge:

1-Hamlet: The protagonist is driven by the need to avenge his father's murder. After learning from the ghost of King Hamlet that his uncle Claudius is the murderer, Hamlet is consumed by his quest for revenge. This quest leads to his feigned madness, the play-within-a-play to confirm Claudius's guilt, and ultimately a tragic chain of events.

2-Laertes: Laertes seeks revenge for the death of his father, Polonius, who was accidentally killed by Hamlet. Laertes's desire for vengeance is immediate and intense, and he conspires with Claudius to kill Hamlet in a duel. His quest for revenge contrasts with Hamlet's more introspective and delayed approach.

3-Fortinbras: Although not directly involved in the main action of the play, Fortinbras seeks to avenge his father's death and reclaim lands lost to Denmark. His pursuit of revenge serves as a backdrop to Hamlet's story, highlighting different approaches to the theme of revenge and the political implications of such actions.

Each of these characters' pursuit of revenge drives their actions and ultimately contributes to the play's tragic conclusion.

Act 1, Scene 2

Setting: The scene takes place in the royal court of Elsinore, Denmark.

1. **Opening:** The scene begins with King Claudius addressing his court. He speaks about the recent death of his brother, King Hamlet (the Ghost's appearance in Act 1, Scene 1), and his own swift marriage to Queen Gertrude, Hamlet's mother. Claudius attempts to present this rapid transition as a positive and pragmatic solution, despite the mourning period.

Voltemand: He is one of Claudius's courtiers. In Act 1, Scene 2, Voltemand, along with Cornelius, is sent by Claudius to deliver a message to Fortinbras's uncle, the King of Norway. The purpose of this mission is to persuade the Norwegian King to restrain his nephew, Fortinbras, from attacking Denmark. This scene helps establish the political tension and the broader geopolitical context of the play.

Cornelius: Like Voltemand, Cornelius is also a messenger sent by Claudius. His role is to accompany Voltemand on the diplomatic mission to Norway. Their joint mission highlights the king's concern with external threats and sets up the play's exploration of political intrigue and the consequences of ambition.

2. **Political Matters:** Claudius addresses the political situation, including a potential threat from Norway. Fortinbras, the young prince of Norway, is seeking to reclaim lands lost by his father, King Fortinbras. Claudius has sent ambassadors to negotiate peace with the Norwegian king.
3. **Hamlet's Grief:** Hamlet, the young prince and son of the late King Hamlet, is in mourning. Claudius tries to console him, suggesting that he should view death as a natural part of life and move on from his grief. However, Hamlet's responses reveal his deep sorrow and frustration.
4. **The Ghost's Appearance:** Claudius's speech ends, and he exits with the rest of the court, leaving Hamlet alone. Hamlet reflects on his father's death and his mother's quick remarriage. He laments that his sorrow is compounded by the seeming triviality with which others regard it.
5. **Horatio and Marcellus:** Hamlet meets with Horatio and Marcellus, who have come to inform him about the ghost they have seen. They discuss the appearance of the ghost, which closely resembles Hamlet's deceased father. Hamlet is intrigued and eager to see the ghost himself.

Themes:

- **1-Grief and Mourning:** Hamlet's deep sorrow over his father's death and his disapproval of his mother's hasty remarriage set up one of the play's central conflicts. This scene explores themes of mourning, betrayal, and the contrast between public appearances and private feelings.
- **2-Political Corruption:** Claudius's speech tries to present a façade of stability and legitimacy, but his rapid ascent to power and the underlying tension about Norway hint at deeper corruption and moral ambiguity in the Danish court.
- **3-Appearance vs. Reality:** Claudius's smooth talk contrasts sharply with Hamlet's genuine grief, underscoring the theme of appearance versus reality. The disparity between what is said and what is truly felt or meant is a recurring motif in the play.

"O that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! O God!
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't! O fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature"

This passage is from William Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, specifically from Hamlet's soliloquy in Act 1, Scene 2. It is a profound moment of existential despair where Hamlet reflects on his disillusionment with life and the world around him. The explanation of the lines:

"O that this too too solid flesh would melt, / Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!"

- **"O that this too too solid flesh would melt"**: Hamlet is expressing a deep wish for his physical body to dissolve or disappear. The term "solid flesh" suggests that he feels burdened or weighed down by his own physical existence.

- **"Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew"**: He wishes that his body could turn into something as ephemeral and insubstantial as dew, which would be a release from his current state of suffering.

"Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!"

- **"Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!"**: Here, Hamlet laments that God (the "Everlasting") has forbidden suicide ("self-slaughter") through divine decree ("canon"). He wishes that this prohibition did not exist, implying that he would prefer to end his own life if it were not for religious and moral constraints.

"O God! O God!"

- This exclamation underscores Hamlet's emotional intensity and despair. It's a cry for divine intervention or understanding in the face of his suffering.

"How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable / Seem to me all the uses of this world!"

- **"How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable"**: Hamlet is describing his sense of exhaustion ("weary"), boredom ("stale"), dullness ("flat"), and lack of value ("unprofitable") with everything in the world. This suggests a deep sense of disenchantment and disillusionment.
- **"Seem to me all the uses of this world"**: He feels that all the activities and purposes in life are pointless and unfulfilling.

"Fie on't! O fie! 'tis an unweeded garden, / That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature"

- **"Fie on't! O fie!"**: "Fie" is an exclamation of disgust or disappointment. Hamlet is expressing contempt for the state of the world.
- **"'tis an unweeded garden"**: He compares the world to a garden that has been neglected and overgrown with weeds. This metaphor suggests that the world has become corrupted and overrun with undesirable things.
- **"That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature"**: The garden (the world) has gone to seed, meaning it has deteriorated, leading to the growth

of "rank and gross" (unpleasant and corrupt) things. This imagery reflects Hamlet's perception of moral and societal decay.

Overall Analysis:

In this soliloquy, Hamlet is grappling with profound existential questions and personal despair. His wish to escape his physical body and the world reflects his deep inner turmoil and dissatisfaction with life. The passage illustrates his struggle with the concept of mortality, the constraints of religious doctrine, and his perception of a corrupt and meaningless world. Hamlet's emotional state in this speech sets the stage for his subsequent actions and decisions throughout the play.

Why seems it so particular with thee?
HAMLET
'Seems,' madam? Nay it is. I know not 'seems.'
'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
Nor the dejected havior of the visage,
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
That can denote me truly. These indeed 'seem,'
For they are actions that a man might play:
But I have that within which passes show,
These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

Hamlet addresses his mother, Queen Gertrude, who questions why his grief over his father's death seems so profound and distinctive. Hamlet responds by rejecting the idea that his sorrow is merely an outward appearance. He insists that his grief cannot be fully captured by his external displays of mourning, such as his black clothing, sighs, tears, or mournful demeanor.

Hamlet argues that these outward signs—his "inky cloak," "customary suits of solemn black," and other visible markers of sorrow—are superficial and do not represent the depth of his true feelings. He emphasizes that while these external signs might appear as conventional markers of mourning, they do not reflect the genuine nature of his inner turmoil. Hamlet believes that his true grief is something deeper and more profound, beyond mere appearances. The phrase "I have

that within which passes show" highlights his view that real grief is an internal experience that transcends outward manifestations.

In essence, Hamlet is asserting that his emotional suffering is authentic and far more intense than what can be displayed through conventional symbols of mourning. He feels that his true anguish is beyond the mere "trappings and the suits of woe" that others might see. This passage underscores Hamlet's existential struggle and his sense of isolation, as he grapples with the gap between his internal state and how it is perceived by others.

Act 1, Scene 3

Laertes says goodbye to his sister, Ophelia, whom we learn has been seeing Hamlet. He warns her that Hamlet, still in line to be king, will always put the kingdom before her.

Act 1, Scene 3 of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the scene unfolds primarily in Polonius's house. This scene is important because it introduces us to the dynamics between Polonius, his children Ophelia and Laertes, and their perspectives on matters of love and duty. **Summary:**

- **Laertes' Departure:** The scene opens with Laertes preparing to leave for France. He offers his father, Polonius, some advice on how to live his life wisely and with integrity. Laertes speaks about being true to oneself and not

getting involved in quarrels or lending money, emphasizing the importance of maintaining one's honor and reputation.

- **Polonius' Advice to Laertes:** Polonius gives Laertes a series of practical and somewhat lengthy pieces of advice. He advises Laertes to be friendly, but not overly familiar; to be a good listener but not a talkative person; and to hold his own opinions, but also be open to others' advice. The advice is somewhat ironic, as Polonius himself is often depicted as a meddlesome and self-important figure.

Neither a borrower nor a lender be,
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,

Polonius is giving Laertes a series of maxims to guide him as he goes off to university. Here's a breakdown of each part:

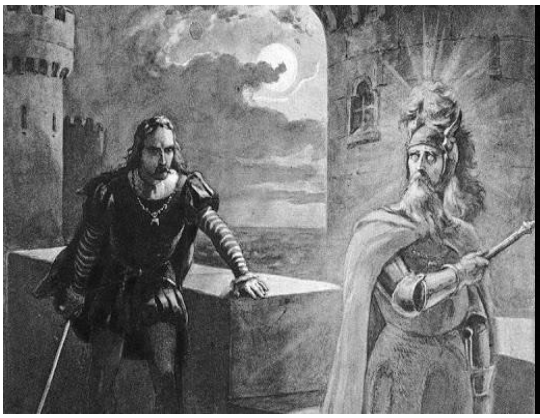
1. **"Neither a borrower nor a lender be,"** Polonius advises Laertes to avoid borrowing or lending money. The reasoning is that lending money can lead to the loss of both the money and the friendship. When you lend money, you risk straining relationships if the borrower fails to repay. Conversely, borrowing money can create dependency and compromise your ability to manage your own affairs responsibly.
2. **"For loan oft loses both itself and friend,"** This line reinforces the idea that lending money often results in losing both the loaned amount and the friendship. Financial transactions between friends can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts, potentially ruining relationships.

3. **"And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry."** "Husbandry" refers to the management and cultivation of resources or finances. Borrowing can lead to a lack of diligence in managing one's own resources effectively. If you're always borrowing, you might become less disciplined in handling your own finances.
4. **"This above all: to thine own self be true,"** Polonius emphasizes the importance of being honest with oneself. Authenticity and self-awareness are crucial. If you are true to yourself, your actions and decisions will naturally align with your true values and beliefs.
5. **"And it must follow, as the night the day,"** If you are true to yourself, this authenticity will naturally lead to other positive outcomes, just as surely as night follows day. It's an inevitable consequence of living an authentic life.

- **Polonius' Advice to Ophelia:** After Laertes departs; Polonius enters and questions Ophelia about her interactions with Hamlet. Ophelia reveals that Hamlet has been behaving in a manner that indicates he is in love with her. Polonius, dismissive of Ophelia's feelings, instructs her to avoid seeing Hamlet and to reject his advances, believing that Hamlet's affections are not genuine.

Act 1, Scene 4

That night, Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus, one of the guards who had seen the ghost, wait outside on another cold night. The miserable weather is juxtaposed again with revelry from the castle, which Hamlet criticizes as excessive and damaging to Danes' reputation for drunkenness.The ghost appears and beckons Hamlet. Marcellus and Horatio try to prevent him from following, agreeing with Hamlet that it might bring "airs from heaven or blasts from hell." Hamlet breaks free and follows the ghost. His accomplices follow him.



“Something is rotten in the state of Denmark”

In *Hamlet*, the line is uttered after the ghost of Hamlet's father appears, prompting Marcellus and Horatio to express their unease about the state of affairs in Denmark. Marcellus's statement suggests a deeper malaise affecting the nation, hinting at political corruption and moral decay. The "rotten" state refers not only to the physical realm but also to the ethical and political dimensions of Denmark, which is portrayed as a place rife with villainy and treachery, particularly surrounding the actions of King Claudius and Queen Gertrude following the death of King Hamlet.

The imagery of decay and disease permeates the play, reinforcing the idea of a corrupt state. Hamlet himself describes Denmark as an "unweeded garden," indicating that the moral and political landscape is overrun with corruption and neglect. This theme is echoed throughout the text, where images of illness and decay serve as metaphors for the moral rot within the court and the broader society.

Symbols

A-**The Ghost**: The appearance of the ghost of Old Hamlet in the very first scene of the play symbolizes tough times are coming ahead. It signifies the presence of supernatural powers like the three witches of Macbeth. However, it represents the difficult times ahead for Hamlet as well as Claudius, making the revelation that Claudius is the murderer of Old Hamlet. Ghost also symbolizes the foreshadow of the upcoming the turmoil in Denmark as Hamlet prepares to take revenge against Claudius. It shows that the ghost is not a good but a bad omen for the state of Denmark as well as its ruler, Claudius.

B-Poison: Poison is a recurring symbol in the play that appears in various scenes specifically when the ghost appears. The ghost explains to the young Hamlet the henbane is poured into the ears of Old Hamlet to kill him. This poison killed him instantly, blocking his blood. Therefore, poisoning a person here in Hamlet symbolizes betrayal, deception, and treachery. This symbol of poison is significant and exposes Claudius evil character.

C- Weather: Weather is another important symbol in Hamlet. It shows that the bad weather is the sign of worse situation coming ahead and good weather points to good times. However, in the first scene, Shakespeare has shown that the weather is frigid and foggy in which the ghost of Old Hamlet appears. This confusing and ambivalent weather is signifying the same situation coming ahead. Hamlet is confused like the situation that is hazy and unclear. Therefore, the good or bad weather is the sign of good or bad times in the play.

Act 1, Scene 5

The ghost tells Hamlet that he is Hamlet's father spirit and was murdered by Claudius, who put poison in the napping king's ear. The ghost asks Hamlet to revenge his "most foul, strange, and unnatural murder," and Hamlet agrees without hesitation.

The ghost also tells Hamlet that his mother was adulterous with Claudius before the old king died. He makes Hamlet promise that he won't seek revenge on his mother but let her be judged by God. As dawn breaks, the ghost leaves.

Hamlet swears he will do what the ghost asks and avenge his father's murder. Horatio and Marcellus find him, and Hamlet asks them to swear not to reveal anything of the ghost. When they hesitate, the ghost calls from below, demanding they swear. They do. Hamlet warns them that he will pretend to be crazy until he can exact vengeance.

The old king's murder creates sympathy for the ghost rather than fear or revulsion, and his mother's adultery tips the scales against her. Hamlet has no choice but to kill the new king, establishing a conflict between his sense of honor and his Christian faith.

Exit-Ghost:

The Ghost leaves, saying "**Adieu, adieu, adieu! remember me**."

The Ghost in *Hamlet* says "Adieu, adieu, adieu! remember me" to emphasize the importance of his plea for revenge and justice. This farewell underscores the gravity of his message to Hamlet and the weight of his unresolved issues. The ultimate aim is to ensure that Hamlet remains focused on avenging his father's murder.

Hamlet swears to remember, but he has a hard time of it. First, Hamlet exclaims

"O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else? / And shall I couple hell?" ,

Hamlet is grappling with the enormity of the ghost's revelation:

1. **"O all you host of heaven!"** - Hamlet is calling upon the heavens, which he personifies as a great host or army. This represents his astonishment and plea for divine intervention or understanding.
2. **"O earth! what else?"** - Here, Hamlet turns to the earth, expressing his dismay and disbelief at the news he's just heard. He is overwhelmed by the gravity of the situation and is questioning what other realms or forces might be involved in this shocking revelation.
3. **"And shall I couple hell?"** - Hamlet is pondering whether he should now also consider hell as a part of this cosmic drama. The word "couple" here means to join or connect. Hamlet is wondering if the revelations about his father's murder and the

betrayal of his uncle (Claudius) are so horrific that they might be connected with the infernal or demonic realms of hell.

In essence, Hamlet is overwhelmed by the realization that his father's murder is not just a crime but something that might involve a cosmic struggle between good and evil. He is trying to reconcile this shocking information with his understanding of the world, and is questioning whether the evil of hell itself is implicated in the events that have unfolded.

The thought of his mother brings with it the thought of his step-father, and Hamlet cries out "O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!".

Hamlet has just learned from the ghost of his father that his uncle, Claudius, is the one who murdered his father. This revelation fills Hamlet with a sense of betrayal and anger.

- **"O villain, villain"**: Hamlet is addressing Claudius, calling him a villain—someone wicked or evil. The repetition emphasizes Hamlet's deep frustration and disgust.
- **"smiling"**: Hamlet is particularly enraged by the fact that Claudius, who has committed such a heinous crime, is able to present a friendly, pleasant exterior to the world. This contrast between his outward appearance and his true nature adds to Hamlet's anger.
- **"damned villain"**: This phrase is a more intense condemnation, suggesting that Claudius is not only evil but also damned to hell for his actions.

Overall, this line encapsulates Hamlet's profound disillusionment and the sense of betrayal he feels, not just from the murder of his father but from the duplicitous nature of Claudius. It reflects Hamlet's inner turmoil and sets the stage for his subsequent actions throughout the play.

Ghost says to Hamlet:

"Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge
To prick and sting her."

The Ghost, who is Hamlet's father, is advising Hamlet on how to handle his anger and desire for revenge. Specifically, he urges Hamlet not to let his quest for vengeance extend to his mother, Queen Gertrude.The Ghost is essentially telling Hamlet to focus his revenge solely on King Claudius, who has murdered him, rather than involving Gertrude in his plans. The Ghost believes that Gertrude is already suffering from her own guilt and remorse ("those thorns that in her bosom lodge"). By leaving her to the judgment of heaven and her own conscience, Hamlet can maintain his own moral integrity and not become consumed by bitterness towards his mother.

This advice highlights the theme of moral corruption and the complexities of vengeance in the play. It also emphasizes the Ghost's desire to ensure that Hamlet's actions remain righteous and focused on justice rather than becoming a source of further moral decay.

Enter-Horatio-and-Marcellus:

When he is done writing, Hamlet reminds himself that the most important thing is to remember the ghost, but at that point his friends catch up with him, and he seems to get a bit loopy. Horatio--worried—shout: "Heavens secure him!"

And Marcellus calling to Hamlet. When the two of them get within speaking distance of Hamlet, they ask what happened, and Hamlet makes them promise to keep what he tells them a **secret**. Then Hamlet **almost** tells them the news.

Ghost cries under the stage:

Hamlet now asks Horatio and Marcellus to keep everything they have seen this night a secret. They agree, but he demands that they "swear" it, and they get scared and confused. Marcellus protests that they have already sworn, but Hamlet insists, saying "upon my sword, indeed." At that moment the Ghost comes to Hamlet's aid, calling out from under the stage, "**Swear**".

What follows is manic. Hamlet welcomes the Ghost's assistance with a kind of joy, referring to him as "**truepenny**" and "**old mole**

Hamlet's reaction to the Ghost of his father is complex and layered with both relief and apprehension. When Hamlet addresses the Ghost as "truepenny" and "old mole," these terms reflect his mixture of joy, recognition, and a bit of cynicism.

1. **"Truepenny"**: This term is somewhat colloquial and refers to someone who is genuine or reliable. Hamlet uses it to acknowledge that the Ghost is a trustworthy source of information. It shows Hamlet's relief and gratitude that his father's spirit is truthful and not a deceiving apparition.
2. **"Old mole"**: This phrase has a more ambiguous meaning. "Old mole" can be interpreted in a few ways:
    - It might refer to the Ghost's connection to the earth and the grave, as a mole burrows in the ground, symbolizing death and the underworld.
    - It could also hint at the Ghost's role in uncovering hidden truths or secrets, as moles dig beneath the surface, metaphorically bringing buried matters to light.

Hamlet's use of these terms underscores his eagerness to hear the Ghost's revelations about his father's murder. His feelings are complicated: he is hopeful for answers and justice, yet he is also aware of the eerie and potentially unsettling nature of the ghostly encounter. The way Hamlet addresses the Ghost suggests both a sense of relief and an acknowledgment of the supernatural complexities at play.

Finally, Hamlet stops, saying to the Ghost "rest, rest, perturbed spirit." Most editors assume that the men swear by putting their hands on Hamlet's sword, and editors generally put in a stage direction such as "They swear," but there's no such stage direction in any of the original texts.

"Hamlet" sets up many of the play's central themes and conflicts.

Scene 1:

1. **What is the significance of the ghost's appearance at the beginning of the play?**
- How does the ghost's appearance set the tone for the rest of the play?
- What might the ghost's presence suggest about the state of Denmark?
2. **How do the characters of Francisco, Barnardo, and Marcellus contribute to the development of the play's mood and atmosphere?**
- What do their interactions and reactions tell us about the political and social climate in Denmark?
3. **What do we learn about the relationship between Hamlet and the ghost in this scene?**
- How does Hamlet's response to the ghost foreshadow his actions later in the play?

Scene 2:

1. **What are King Claudius's motives for marrying Queen Gertrude so soon after King Hamlet's death?**
- How does Claudius justify his marriage, and what does this reveal about his character?
2. **How does Hamlet react to his mother's marriage to Claudius?**
- What does his reaction reveal about his feelings toward his mother and the new king?
3. **What are Laertes and Polonius's concerns about Ophelia's relationship with Hamlet?**
- How do their concerns reflect the play's themes of appearance versus reality and the role of women?

Scene 3:

1. **What advice does Polonius give to Laertes, and what does this advice reveal about Polonius's character?**
   - How does Polonius's advice reflect the societal norms and expectations of the time?
2. **How does Ophelia's interaction with Hamlet in this scene contribute to the development of their relationship?**
   - What impact does this interaction have on the audience's perception of Hamlet and Ophelia?

Scene 4:

1. **What is the significance of Hamlet's soliloquy in this scene?**
   - How does Hamlet's speech about the ghost and his doubts about its intentions contribute to the play's exploration of uncertainty and madness?
2. **How does the ghost reveal information about King Hamlet's death and the nature of his murder?**
   - What does the ghost's revelation imply about Claudius's role in the murder and the theme of revenge?

Scene 5:

1. **What does the ghost reveal to Hamlet about his death?**
   - How does this revelation affect Hamlet's understanding of his situation and his subsequent actions?
2. **What are Hamlet's plans after hearing the ghost's account of King Hamlet's murder?**
   - How does this moment mark the beginning of Hamlet's quest for revenge, and what are the implications for the rest of the play?

Act 2, Scene 1

Polonius sends his servant, Reynaldo, to France to bring Laertes money and snoop into his son's life. Polonius suggests Reynaldo should ask around about Laertes to discover how he is living. In directing Reynaldo, Polonius urges his servant to suggest some negative qualities about Laertes—gaming, drinking, fencing, and swearing—when he talks with people. Polonius is confident this method will yield the truth about Laertes's behavior abroad.

Polonius

Reynaldo

In the second half of the scene, Ophelia enters distraught. She relates to Polonius that Hamlet came to her in her chamber disheveled and confused. Believing Hamlet to be mad with lust for Ophelia, Polonius asks if she has said anything

upsetting to him. Ophelia answers that she has not spoken with him but has simply refused his letters and denied him any contact, as Polonius instructed.
Polonius is convinced that by telling Ophelia to avoid Hamlet, he has inadvertently fanned the flames of the prince's love. He tells Ophelia that they must tell the king and queen about the romantic connection between Hamlet and her, adding that concealing it might cause more grief than the knowledge that Hamlet has fallen for someone "beneath him."

Act 2, Scene 2

Claudius and Gertrude hire Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two of Hamlet's childhood friends, to spend time with Hamlet, hoping they will be able to determine the cause of his strange behavior.

After attendants take the friends to visit Hamlet, Polonius.
Followed closely by **ambassadors** Voltemand and Cornelius, join the royal pair. The ambassadors, who have returned from speaking with the king of Norway about Fortinbras, are happy to report their visit as successful.
"Old Norway," they say, has commanded Fortinbras to abandon any acts of force against Denmark. Fortinbras has vowed obedience to his uncle and has turned his attention to Poland, where he originally told his uncle he was going. Voltemand notes that Fortinbras has asked permission for him and his men to pass through Denmark en route to Poland.

As the ambassadors exit.

Polonius tells Claudius and Gertrude he thinks Hamlet's **love** for Ophelia is driving him **mad**. Polonius then reads them a **letter** sent from Hamlet to Ophelia, in which he proclaims his love for her. **Together**, Polonius, Claudius, and Gertrude decide to lay a **trap**, orchestrating a meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia and watching from afar.

Hamlet meets Polonius and responds with a line that seems to be a non-sequitur: "**Excellent well; you are a fishmonger**."

This line is filled with potential meanings and interpretations:

1. **Literal Meaning**: On a surface level, Hamlet is calling Polonius a fishmonger, which means a dealer in fish. This could be seen as a way to insult Polonius by suggesting he deals in something lowly or insignificant.
2. **Symbolic Meaning**: The term "fishmonger" might be a play on words or a symbol. In Elizabethan times, fishmongers were often associated with the lower classes and with the idea of being somewhat corrupt or deceitful. By calling Polonius a fishmonger, Hamlet might be implying that Polonius is involved in something morally dubious or unworthy.
3. **Indirect Commentary**: Hamlet's comment can also be seen as a way of mocking Polonius. In the context of the play, Polonius is a character who meddles and tries to manipulate situations for his own gain. Hamlet's remark might be a subtle critique of Polonius's attempts to interfere in his life.
4. **Foreshadowing**: Hamlet's remarks are often layered with meaning. By calling Polonius a fishmonger, Hamlet could be hinting at Polonius's own deceitfulness or the idea that he is involved in dubious dealings.

While walking in the hall. They talk a little, with Hamlet verbally sparring in clever if not chaotic circles around the older man. Polonius, taking this as evidence of the **prince's madness**, excuses himself to go in search of Ophelia and plan a "**chance**" meeting.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern appear, and Hamlet asks several times what brings them to Elsinore. Although they try to evade his questions, Hamlet quickly figures out that they've been sent to **spy** on him. The one good bit of information they give Hamlet is that a **company of players** has come to Elsinore.

With some excitement, Hamlet greets the players. Hamlet arranges for them to perform ***The Murder of Gonzago*** in the court the following night—and to incorporate some lines he will give them. Once Hamlet is alone, he speaks aloud, berating himself for his **lack of action** with the task the ghost has given him.
He calls himself a coward and a villain, railing in his grief. Then, pulling himself together, he muses aloud about his plan to use the play—augmented with lines he will write—as a means to probe **Claudius's conscience**. Hamlet is convinced that if Claudius reacts **guiltily**, it will prove that the ghost is a **noble spirit** and not a devil come to trick him.

The Mousetrap

Hamlet, in asking the players to perform ***The Murder of Gonzago*** with a few revisions, suggests that he has an understanding and appreciation for the idea of life imitating art. In this particular case, Hamlet is hoping to put that idea to use to catch the conscience of the king. In *The Mousetrap*, the edited version of the play, nearly everything is a symbol for the truth Hamlet hopes to uncover, with the most obvious symbols in the casting: "I'll have these players play something like the murder of my father." The King in *The Mousetrap* symbolizes King Hamlet and The Poisoner obviously symbolizes Claudius.

The Murder of Gonzago is a play-within-a-play featured in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The origin story of this fictional play within the play isn't explicitly detailed in historical records but is crafted by Shakespeare to advance the plot of his own play.

In *Hamlet*, the play is performed by a group of actors to "catch the conscience of the king." Hamlet uses it to mirror the murder of his own father, King Hamlet, by his uncle Claudius. The plot of *The Murder of Gonzago* involves the murder of a king named Gonzago by his nephew, Lucianus, who pours poison into Gonzago's ear while he is asleep. This mirrors the way Claudius killed Hamlet's father.Shakespeare invented *The Murder of Gonzago* as a device to explore themes of guilt and deception and to push the plot forward. It serves as a critical moment in the play, as Claudius's reaction to the play reveals his guilt and confirms Hamlet's suspicions. The play-within-a-play technique allows authors to create layers of meaning and adds complexity to their works, engaging audiences in a more intricate exploration of narrative and theme.

Act 3, Scene 1

Claudius and Gertrude interrogate Rosencrantz and Guildenstern about their **discussion** with Hamlet. The men have **little** to report except that the **company** of players who arrived shortly after they did seemed to have **interested** and **pleased** the prince, and that he has directed them to perform for the court this evening. Claudius sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to watch the prince and encourage him in this **endeavor**.

When they leave, Claudius sends Gertrude off so that he, Polonius, and Ophelia can **plan** the "**chance**" meeting between Ophelia and Hamlet. Through this staged meeting, Claudius and Polonius hope to test Polonius's thought that it is Hamlet's love for Ophelia that is so distracting him. They instruct Ophelia to stroll the hall, seemingly **absorbed** in a book, while they **hide** nearby to watch and listen.

Hamlet eventually appears, lost in his **thoughts** and apparently contemplating **suicide**. Catching sight of **Ophelia**, he interrupts his thoughts to **speak** with her. Ophelia tries to return some gifts he gave her, but, suspicious of her motives, he denies they are from him. He further denies that he loved her, which serves to bewilder and wound Ophelia. The two have an impassioned discussion, reeling in confusion and a mutual feeling of betrayal. Hamlet orders her to a nunnery and leaves.

A dialogue between Hamlet and his lover Ophelia

LORD POLONIUS I hear him coming: let's withdraw, my lord.

[Exeunt KING CLAUDIUS and POLONIUS]

[Enter HAMLET]

HAMLET **To be, or not to be: that is the question:**

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause: there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life;
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,

The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,

The insolence of office and the spurns

That patient merit of the unworthy takes,

When he himself might his quietus make

With a bare bodkin? who would fardels bear,

To grunt and sweat under a weary life,

But that the dread of something after death,

The undiscover'd country from whose bourn

No traveller returns, puzzles the will **80**

And makes us rather bear those ills we have

Than fly to others that we know not of?

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;

And thus the native hue of resolution

Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,

And enterprises of great pith and moment

With this regard their currents turn awry,

And lose the name of action.--Soft you now!

The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons

Be all my sins remember'd.

OPHELIA **Good my lord,** **90**

How does your honour for this many a day?

HAMLET **I humbly thank you; well, well, well.**

OPHELIA **My lord, I have remembrances of yours,**

That I have longed long to re-deliver;

I pray you, now receive them.

HAMLET **No, not I;**

I never gave you aught.

OPHELIA **My honour'd lord, you know right well you did;**

And, with them, words of so sweet breath composed

As made the things more rich: their perfume lost,

Take these again; for to the noble mind

Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.

There, my lord.

HAMLET **Ha, ha! are you honest?**

OPHELIA **My lord?**

HAMLET **Are you fair?**

OPHELIA **What means your lordship?**

HAMLET **That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty.**

OPHELIA **Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with honesty?**

HAMLET **Ay, truly; for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness: this was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. I did love you once.**

OPHELIA **Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.**

HAMLET **You should not have believed me; for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it: I loved you not.**

OPHELIA **I was the more deceived.**

HAMLET **Get thee to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest; but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me: I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them**

in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves, all; believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. Where's your father?

OPHELIA **At home, my lord.**

HAMLET **Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool no where but in's own house. Farewell.**

OPHELIA **O, help him, you sweet heavens!**

HAMLET **If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery, go: farewell. Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery, go, and quickly too. Farewell.**

OPHELIA **O heavenly powers, restore him!**

HAMLET **I have heard of your paintings too, well enough; God has given you one face, and you make yourselves another: you jig, you amble, and you lisp, and nick-name God's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on't; it hath made me mad. I say, we will have no more marriages: those that are married already, all but one, shall live; the rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go.**

[Exit]

Claudius and Polonius come to Ophelia's side, shocked by what they have witnessed. Polonius insists Hamlet's love for Ophelia—love that Polonius made her refuse—is at the root of the prince's madness. Claudius, already beginning to show a guilty conscience as an earlier aside suggests, is now convinced that Hamlet is brooding on something bigger—something that could be dangerous to his position. Although he initially refutes the idea that Hamlet is mad, he does say that madness should not go unchecked. He decides to send Hamlet to England, away from the stress of Denmark. Polonius agrees that sending him abroad is the best course, but also suggests trying one last idea: sending the queen to speak with Hamlet after the play that evening, while he (Polonius) hides nearby to witness the conversation. Claudius consents.

~~(from "Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou" to "The rest shall keep as they are. / To a nunnery, go")~~

Hamlet has lost faith in humanity at the point when he meets Ophelia in this scene. His uncle has allegedly murdered his father. His mother has married his uncle. His old friends have come, supposedly to see him, but he has already figured out they were "sent for" by Claudius to scope out Hamlet's state of mind. And now, here comes Ophelia, the girl he is deeply in love with, to give him back the letters he has given her.

The dialogue also implies that Hamlet knows he's being listened to, and if he has figured that out, by the time he utters the line "Get thee to a nunnery" toward the end of the scene, he probably suspects that Ophelia has taken part in the plot against him.

Everybody looks pretty bad from Hamlet's perspective. So why should Ophelia get married and have children, or, in other words, make more people like Claudius, Polonius, his mother, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Ophelia?

Hamlet wants her to shut herself off from the rest of the world—which, in a convent, she would have to do. However, you could argue he still loves her and is saying this out of jealousy: if she's a nun, no other guy will be able to pursue her. Either way, he wants her to be punished for breaking his heart and being the tool of Claudius.

On a small side note, the word "convent" or "nunnery," in Elizabethan England, was a slang term for a house of prostitution. So, Hamlet may be calling her a rude name for breaking up with him (while at the same time expressing a deep-seated misanthropy).(Misogyny)

تعبير اخر (أدناه)

Hamlet's "get thee to a nunnery speech" is filled with a passionate response that seems to take the form of anger, hurt, and love. While it is obvious that he once loved Ophelia, it seems that the pain he feels for "losing" her causes him to suppress whatever he once felt in order to help himself. The speech can be interpreted in a number of different ways, but the most prominent is the double meaning of Ophelia's corruption.

A nunnery means a convent but it is a term that was occasionally used to refer to a brothel. If Hamlet really means "nunnery," then he is saying that Ophelia should become a nun in order to preserve her chastity and avoid bearing children that are "sinners." If, however, Hamlet means "brothel" ("nunnery" was Elizabethan slang for this), then he is criticizing Ophelia for not being chaste enough. . The contrast of the nunnery and the whorehouse presents the idea that Ophelia's pure nature has been made impure and as Hamlet says "why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?" referencing the wrongful path Ophelia has taken. To further prove how Ophelia has changed Hamlet says "I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny." In this quote Hamlet curses Ophelia forever, saying while she may be pure in reality she will not escape the slanderous rumors of her supposed premarital sex, and if she doth marry in the future she will bring that burden with her to the relationship.

Nun

Brothel

The **symbolism** in this quote greatly lends itself to the interpretation of corruption. Shakespeare chooses to use similes comparing Ophelia to both ice and snow. While both are white, a common color to represent purity, they both feature a sort of hidden burden. While being beautiful they can also be dangerous, snow can suffocate an individual and ice can cause them to fall: similarly, Ophelia is falling into an overwhelming drift of doom and despair. Additionally, the snow and ice represent Ophelia's transition. While both are forms of frozen water snow is much softer than ice, conveying that Ophelia has become less gentle and good with time. While the nunnery is clearly a representation of corruption it also may symbolize the mentality that if Hamlet cannot have Ophelia no one can. Were she to go to a nunnery and devote herself to god she would never be married and therefore no one would love her as Hamlet did. Hamlet's (old) love with Ophelia portrays the selfish side of him. He cares not for her best interest or her feelings but only what he feels.

Symbol :Flowers

Flowers appear in Hamlet when Ophelia loses her mind. She starts distributing flowers to everybody she meets. She presents each flower, describing what it stands for and then moves to the next. The flowers show various features as she states that rosemary is for remembrance, pansy for thoughts and so on. Ophelia expresses her pain of the betrayal she felt by offering the flowers and describing what they symbolize. Her father's murder and Hamlet's taunt takes its toll on her. That is why the flowers symbolize her inner turmoil and her faithfulness.

" To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?—To die,—to sleep,— "

This quote is from Hamlet's famous soliloquy in Act 3, Scene 1 of Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*. It encapsulates Hamlet's profound existential contemplation and his internal struggle with the nature of existence and the concept of suffering.

1. **"To be, or not to be: that is the question:"**
    - Hamlet is pondering the fundamental question of existence: whether it is better to continue living ("to be") or to end one's life ("not to be"). This sets up the central theme of the soliloquy—whether enduring life's hardships is preferable to ending one's suffering through death.
2. **"Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer / The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune"**
    - Hamlet considers whether it is more honorable to endure the painful and random misfortunes of life (the "slings and arrows" are metaphors for these trials).
3. **"Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, / And by opposing end them?"**
    - Alternatively, Hamlet contemplates fighting against these troubles (represented as a "sea" of difficulties). He wonders if confronting and challenging these problems might lead to their resolution or if it is better to avoid them through death.
    -

4. **"To die,—to sleep,—"**
    - Here, Hamlet refers to death as a form of sleep, which suggests both the end of suffering and a state of rest. The idea of sleep underscores the desire for peace and relief from the struggles of life.
5. **"To die: / To sleep: / No more;"**
    - This repetition emphasizes the notion of death as a final escape from the troubles of life. However, this is not a straightforward resolution.

This soliloquy reflects Hamlet's deep philosophical and moral uncertainty. He is not merely considering the end of his own life but is grappling with larger questions about the nature of suffering, the morality of suicide, and the value of enduring life's challenges. Hamlet's introspection reveals his inner turmoil and sets the stage for his subsequent actions in the play.

Act 3, Scene 2

Hamlet coaches the actors in anticipation of the performance they are about to give for Claudius, Gertrude, and the rest of the court. As the players leave the prince to ready themselves, Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern enter, announcing that the king and queen will **join** them shortly. Hamlet sends the three of them off to hurry the players just as Horatio arrives.

Hamlet **Horatio**

Hamlet's best and close friend who he trusting him

Hamlet tells Horatio of his **plan** to use *The Mousetrap*—his version of *The Murder of Gonzago*—to catch the king off guard. He further reports that he has amended the presentation so that one scene **re-creates** what the ghost told him to be the circumstances of his father's murder. Most importantly, Hamlet instructs Horatio to watch the king's reaction.

As the play **unfolds**, Hamlet's additions to the original piece make for a strong, disturbing performance. It becomes too much for Claudius, who **leaps** to his feet and **leaves**. In the ensuing **confusion**, the play is **halted**, and all **leave** but Hamlet and Horatio, who **recap** what they've just seen.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter, telling Hamlet **that the queen wishes to see him**. They go around and around with Hamlet, trying to **convince** him to go to the queen. They are joined by Polonius, who speaks to Hamlet as if he is humoring a fool. They rouse Hamlet's anger, and he sends them off with **word** that he will join Gertrude soon. Left to his own **thoughts**, Hamlet's resolve to kill Claudius rises again, even as he plans to visit Gertrude.

Act 3, Scene 3

This scene takes place the same evening as the production of *The Murder of Gonzago*. After everyone has **dispersed** from the hall where the play was performed, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern meet with Claudius. Claudius tells them that Hamlet, being **dangerous** in his madness, must be taken **away** to England for everyone's safety. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern accept the assignment and leave to prepare.

Polonius comes to Claudius, reporting that Hamlet is **headed** to see Gertrude in her chambers. Polonius hurries off to **hide** somewhere in the vicinity so that he may observe the **interaction** between mother and son.

Left alone, Claudius **contemplates** the murder that audiences now know he committed. In a soliloquy, he talks about seeking forgiveness for his sin and praying over it—and he wonders about being pardoned for it if he retains all the power he gained in committing it. From his speech, it appears Claudius wants to be pardoned for his deed but not if getting pardoned means giving up crown and queen.

Hamlet, en route to see his mother, finds Claudius attempting to pray. He momentarily considers killing the king then and there but realizes—according to beliefs of the time—that if he were to **kill** Claudius while in **prayer** and seeking **repentance** (which he thinks Claudius is)—he would inadvertently send him straight to heaven. With that, he moves on to find his mother.

A villain kills my father ,and,for that

I,his sole son,do this same villain send

To heaven

Claudius in prayer, the perfect moment to strike

Act 3, Scene 4

This scene also takes place on the night of the production of *The Murder of Gonzago* in which Hamlet has tried to prove to himself that Claudius has killed his father. In the queen's chambers, Polonius instructs Gertrude on speaking with Hamlet and hides himself behind a tapestry before Hamlet enters.
When Hamlet arrives, he and Gertrude begin talking, with Hamlet verbally sparring and growing angry with her. His behavior frightens Gertrude, and she cries out. Polonius cries out in anger from his hiding spot. In response, Hamlet shouts that he hears a rat and stabs Polonius through the tapestry, killing him.

As Hamlet pulls aside the tapestry to find Polonius, both he and Gertrude are hysterical. She is terrified and filled with sorrow for Polonius; Hamlet rages at Gertrude with all the thoughts that have been festering in his brain, including the ideas that Claudius killed King Hamlet and, worse yet, that she may have been part of the scheme to kill his father.

The moment Polnius was killed by Prince Hamlet, thinking that he was King Claudius

In the chaos of their exchange, the ghost appears. He tells Hamlet he has returned both to put him back on task and to remind him to leave his mother alone. As Hamlet responds to the ghost, it becomes clear Gertrude neither sees nor hears the spirit, and the exchange further convinces her of his madness. Hamlet reminds Gertrude he is being banished to England, and that he knows she has hired Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to spy on him. He leaves her, dragging Polonius's body with him.

Q-In *Hamlet*, how does Claudius's furious reaction to *The Mousetrap*'s murder scene lead to Hamlet's killing of Polonius, and what is the dramatic irony in that murder?

1. **The Mousetrap and Claudius's Reaction**:

- *The Mousetrap* is a play that Hamlet has arranged to be performed in front of King Claudius and the court. It depicts a murder strikingly similar to the one Claudius is suspected of having committed: the poisoning of a king by pouring poison in his ear.
- During the performance, Claudius's reaction is one of evident distress and agitation. When the actor enacts the scene of the murder, Claudius abruptly stands up and leaves the performance, showing his guilt and discomfort.

2. **Claudius's Reaction and Its Consequences**:

- Claudius's reaction confirms Hamlet's suspicions of his guilt, as the play was designed to provoke this very response. Hamlet, seeing Claudius's agitation, becomes even more convinced that Claudius is the murderer of his father.

3. **Hamlet and Polonius**:

- After Claudius leaves, Hamlet goes to confront his mother, Queen Gertrude, in her chamber. Polonius, who is spying on this conversation from behind a tapestry (arras), makes a noise, prompting Hamlet to believe it might be Claudius hiding there.
- Hamlet, driven by his recent confirmation of Claudius's guilt and his mounting frustration, stabs through the tapestry, killing Polonius.

4. **Dramatic Irony**:

- The dramatic irony lies in the fact that Hamlet believes he is killing Claudius, the man he holds responsible for his father's death. In reality, he has killed Polonius, who, though a schemer and a meddler, is not directly responsible for Hamlet's father's murder.
- The audience is aware of the mistaken identity because we have seen Polonius's actions and know he is not the king. This adds a layer of tragic complexity as Hamlet's actions, driven by his quest for revenge, inadvertently lead to the death of someone innocent of the crime he is seeking to avenge.

Claudius's reaction to *The Mousetrap* confirms his guilt and intensifies Hamlet's emotional state, leading to the mistaken killing of Polonius. The dramatic irony enhances the tragedy, highlighting the consequences of Hamlet's impulsive actions and the misalignment between intention and outcome.

Act 4, Scene 1

King Claudius and Queen Gertrude, along with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, come together once again in Elsinore Castle. Gertrude dismisses Rosencrantz and Guildenstern so that she may tell Claudius of her meeting with Hamlet. Comparing the prince's madness with the wild power of the wind and the sea vying to see which is mightier, Gertrude tells Claudius of all that transpired between them, including how Hamlet killed Polonius.

Claudius says Hamlet must be sent away at once, and immediately summons Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. He tells them Hamlet has slain Polonius, asks them to find Hamlet, and instructs them to bring Polonius's body to the chapel. Claudius and Gertrude leave to inform their closest supporters, hoping they can control the fallout.

Act 4, Scene 2

After hiding **Polonius**'s body, **Hamlet** returns to the castle and runs into **Rosencrantz and Guildenstern**. They ask him what he's done with the body, and Hamlet replies that he has "**compounded** it with dust." Rosencrantz asks Hamlet again where the body is, and Hamlet shouts that he'd never allow such a "**sponge**" to get the answer out of him. Rosencrantz angrily asks why Hamlet thinks he is a sponge. Hamlet replies that Rosencrantz—and Guildenstern, too—"soak up the king's countenance," doing his dirty work only to allow **Claudius** to wring them dry again and again. Rosencrantz asks, a final time, where the body is. Hamlet replies that it is with the king, though "the king is not with the body." He hurries out of the hall, bidding Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to try to catch him.

What is the metaphor in Hamlet's encounters with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in Hamlet, specifically the three meanings of "sponge"?

In Hamlet, the metaphor of calling Rosencrantz a "sponge" serves to illustrate several key themes about manipulation, loyalty, and the nature of friendship. Hamlet asserts that Rosencrantz is a sponge that "soaks up" the king's favors and commands, emphasizing his role as a sycophant who absorbs whatever the king desires without any independent thought or moral compass.

Interpretation of the Metaphor:

Sycophancy and Manipulation: By referring to Rosencrantz as a sponge, Hamlet critiques his willingness to serve King Claudius, suggesting that Rosencrantz lacks integrity and is merely a tool for the king's ambitions. This highlights the theme of betrayal, as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, once Hamlet's friends, have become pawns in Claudius's schemes against him. Hamlet's disdain for their role reflects his broader disillusionment with the court and its politics.

Absorption of Authority: The sponge metaphor also implies that Rosencrantz is not just passive but actively seeks to absorb the king's authority and approval. This behavior contrasts sharply with Hamlet's own struggle against the corrupt power structures in Denmark. While Hamlet grapples with existential questions and moral dilemmas, Rosencrantz's actions signify a lack of depth and critical engagement with their circumstances.

Friendship and Loyalty: The use of "sponge" underscores the betrayal felt by Hamlet. He expected loyalty from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, yet their actions reveal that they are more interested in self-preservation and favor from the king than in true friendship. This betrayal is compounded by the fact that Hamlet is aware of their duplicity, which adds to his sense of isolation and despair.

Hamlet's description of Rosencrantz as a sponge is not just a personal insult; it reflects the broader moral decay of the Danish court. The metaphor encapsulates the play's exploration of how individuals can be corrupted by power and the lengths to which people will go to maintain their status. By portraying Rosencrantz in this way, Shakespeare critiques the nature of political loyalty and the fragility of human relationships in a world rife with deceit.

Hamlet's metaphor of calling Rosencrantz a sponge serves as a powerful commentary on sycophancy, betrayal, and the complexities of friendship within the corrupt environment of the Danish court. It reveals Hamlet's deepening cynicism and highlights the moral dilemmas faced by individuals navigating a treacherous political landscape.

Act 4, Scene 3

Claudius, by himself, talks of his intent to send Hamlet to England—a plan made all the more reasonable because Hamlet has killed Polonius. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern come to the king with Hamlet in tow. When Claudius asks the whereabouts of Polonius's body, he too is answered in riddles until at last, as if tired of the game, Hamlet tells them where to find the corpse.

Claudius then tells Hamlet they must send him away—for his safety—to England. Hamlet consents, and as he exits, Claudius instructs Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

to follow, saying they must set sail tonight.Once alone, Claudius reveals the papers he has sent with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern ordering Hamlet's death.

Act 4, Scene 4

In this scene, set somewhere near Elsinore Castle, Hamlet, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern are headed for the ship that will carry them to England. They pass Fortinbras and his army, which is passing Elsinore en route to Poland. Hamlet stops to speak with the captain whom Fortinbras has sent to greet King Claudius and thank him for permission to pass through Denmark.
When the captain presses on, Hamlet stops a moment, alone, and compares himself to young Fortinbras. He rebukes himself for his failure to seek revenge for his murdered father when Fortinbras, another young prince who also lost his father, goes to war for honor over a worthless piece of land. At the close of this soliloquy, he again pledges himself to the act the ghost has assigned him.

(How does Hamlet's encounter with the Norwegian troops increase his courage?)

Hamlet meets the Captain of the Norwegian forces on his way to his England bound ship. Here he learns that young Fortinbras is heading over to sack Poland. The Captain informs the only reason they are going to attack Poland is because it is there and the "Polack" will fight to defend it. The country, according to the Captain, is a worthless piece of land.

Hamlet is impressed that Fortinbras is such a "he man" ready to risk lives simply for a fight. He wishes he wasn't such a coward over something that has really insulted him. Hamlet resolves to be a "tough man" just like his hero Fortinbras.By comparison, Hamlet has a great deal to gain from seeking his own bloody revenge on Claudius, and yet he still delays and fails to act toward his purpose. Disgusted with himself for having failed to gain his revenge on Claudius, Hamlet declares that from this moment on, his thoughts will be bloody.

Q-Hamlet sees Fortinbras's army marching toward Poland and comments on the contrast between Fortinbras and himself. Consider this against the thought-versus-action theme.

A-As Hamlet considers the differences between himself and Fortinbras, his definition of greatness, and his own shortcomings, the audience may feel a shift in Hamlet's resolution. It's as if the audience sees Hamlet's thinking unfurl as he observes the doggedness with which Fortinbras and his men pursue their goals—in this case, a tiny plot of Polish soil—even when their gain is at best "a little patch of ground/That hath in it no profit but the name (Act 4, Scene 4, Lines 18–19). Something in that realization and in his discussion with Fortinbras's captain seems to settle in Hamlet, and the prince begins to shift from a man of thought to a man of action. The scene closes with Hamlet's renewed resolution that "From this time forth,/My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!" (Act 4, Scene 4, Lines 67–68). The fact that he reaches this resolution as he is about to set sail for England leaves the audience with the impression that something of Fortinbras—something of his quickness to action—has taken hold of Hamlet.

Act 4, Scene 5

Back at Elsinore Castle, Ophelia has requested an audience with Gertrude. Having heard that Ophelia has been acting strangely since her father's death, the queen does not want to speak with her. But Horatio and other advisers suggest it might be better to speak with her than to let her wild talk and accusations fall on fertile ears. Gertrude submits.

Ophelia enters and is obviously in a disturbed state, singing and talking in a disconnected way. Claudius joins them and both king and queen are shocked by Ophelia's behavior.

Ophelia says, to Claudius

"Lord, we know what we are,
but not what we may be."

When Ophelia leaves, Claudius informs Gertrude that Laertes has secretly returned from France after hearing of his father's death. As they speak, there is noise beyond their door, and a messenger enters to warn king and queen that Laertes, leading a riotous group of people, has come to see them.

Laertes enters; though angry, he convinces his followers to wait outside. He confronts Claudius and Gertrude, demanding answers and his father's body. As the king and queen try to calm him, Ophelia returns, still singing, offering flowers, and wandering in her distraction. Laertes's anger is nearly overwhelmed by his grief at the sight of his sister. Claudius seizes Laertes's moment of weakness and, with comforting words and gestures, convinces Laertes to come with him so that he may explain the circumstances of Polonius's death. Claudius promises Laertes that he will give his crown and kingdom if they find him—or Gertrude—at fault, but otherwise they will stand beside Laertes and help him through this tragedy.

Q-Following Polonius's death, Laertes returns and discovers Ophelia's emotional collapse. What does this suggest for Laertes regarding the thought-versus-action theme?

A-When Laertes storms Elsinore, it would be natural for him to be passionate about his father's death and, as he'll discover, his sister's mental decline. Beyond these considerations, the audience sees that he has become a different man. He is no longer the obedient, thoughtful son and brother. As Hamlet has changed, Laertes, too, has become more of a man of action. The difference between him and Fortinbras and Hamlet, however, is balance. While Fortinbras and Hamlet are finding a balance between thought and action, Laertes, it seems, is lacking that—and perhaps lacking the introspection to even know something is missing. The

audience will learn that Laertes's need for revenge will be his undoing—and the undoing of several others. Perhaps because he falls under the tutelage of Claudius, who is the rank weed here in Denmark, Laertes doesn't stand a chance. With Claudius as his mentor, Laertes cannot achieve the balance between thought and action—and the power that comes from that balance. Fortinbras does achieve that stability, and Hamlet might have done so had he not fallen victim to the events Claudius continues to manipulate. By the play's end, both Fortinbras and Hamlet are their own persons, although only Fortinbras will live into maturity. Laertes, though he seems to be both brave and determined, is manipulated—first by Polonius and then Claudius—and never comes into his own.

Act 4, Scene 6

Horatio is approached by sailors bearing letters from Hamlet. One of the letters is for him; the others are for the king. In the letter to Horatio, Hamlet explains that en route to England their ship was overtaken by pirates, and he alone was taken prisoner. He explains the pirates are "thieves of mercy," and he is to do something for them. He asks that Horatio help the sailors get the other letters to the king and then have the sailors deliver Horatio to Hamlet. Having read his letter, Horatio departs with the sailors to find Hamlet.

Scene 7

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Act 5, Scene 1

In a churchyard, a sexton and a gravedigger prepare a grave. As they go about their business, they are wrapped in their own discussions. Some of what they say is banter; some of what they say has cultural and religious aspects to it.

As one of the men ambles off for liquor, Hamlet and Horatio converge. They speak to the gravedigger, asking about his work, and he tells them he has been a gravedigger since King Hamlet defeated Fortinbras. When Hamlet asks how long that has been, the gravedigger notes that it's been 30 years, having taken place on the day that young Hamlet was born. As they talk, the gravedigger hands Hamlet a skull; it turns out to be the skull of the former king's jester, Yorick. Hamlet, examining the skull, is struck by the information; he tells Horatio that he had known Yorick well.

A procession appears. Claudius, Gertrude, and Laertes lead, followed by a coffin and various other courtiers and attendants. By what people begin to say, it dawns on Hamlet that this is Ophelia's funeral. With Horatio beside him, he watches in disbelief.

Overcome by grief, Laertes jumps into Ophelia's grave, shouting to be buried with her. Hamlet, also overcome, reveals himself and jumps in after Laertes, also proclaiming his sorrow. The two fight, but Horatio and others in attendance separate them and pull them from the grave. Hamlet professes his love for Ophelia—as well as his admiration for Laertes—and runs off. Claudius sends Horatio after Hamlet and steadies Laertes's resolve, telling him his opportunity for revenge will be here soon.

Symbol :

A-Yorick's Skull

The most obvious symbol in the play—and perhaps in Shakespeare's entire body of work—Yorick's skull represents mortality. Should the audience have any question about this symbolism, Hamlet explains it to them (and Horatio) when he says, "No matter one's stance in life, we all must face our own mortality." Hamlet has learned that death is inevitable and, given the "haunting" by his father's ghost, that the physical body is only temporary

B-Graveyard

Although death is in the mind of Hamlet since the play starts, it becomes an important subject when he enters the graveyard. The gravedigger plays with words when responding to Hamlet's questions. He gives him the philosophy of life that all sort of skulls whether they are of the kings or beggars are lying there in the graveyard. He responds that all the dead persons are equal when they are stripped of their political statuses. Graveyard signifies a place where all are equal and the people working in the graveyards become insensitive to the positions and political status of the dead.

Q-In *Hamlet,* Act 5, Scene 1, the audience comes to understand why the image of Hamlet holding Yorick's skull has become a cultural icon. What does this poignant image suggest?

A-Act 5, Scene 1 is well known for the graveyard scene in which Hamlet is given the skull of Yorick, King Hamlet's jester. He relates to Horatio that he had often played with Yorick when he was a child. The image captures the play's theme of mortality, and also suggests Hamlet's struggle between thought and action—specifically, his tendency at the play's outset toward reflection. On another level, if the skull is imagined as representative of King Hamlet's death, the audience may see the the image as a symbol of Hamlet's most basic struggle: to seek revenge or not.

Q-From the ghost to the graveyard to Yorick's skull, mortality is a constant theme in *Hamlet*. How does mortality pertain to Act 5, Scene 2?

A-Although the many deaths in the play's final scene are trademarks of a Shakespearean tragedy, here they do double duty, reminding the audience once again to consider mortality. Situational irony has Claudius succumb to his own terrible plan in this scene, and the moment brings the audience full circle: Claudius's schemes resulting in someone's death. Regarding Claudius in particular, the idea of mortality here pointedly suggests how insubstantial a person's time on this mortal coil can be. Further, his death makes the point that mortality is universal and unavoidable. We all eventually face death—no matter how powerful one is or how clever and scheming one has been. Here in the final scene, the idea of mortality is strong enough just in the number of deaths, but there is irony and tragedy woven into each as well. Dramatic irony is involved in all the deaths, and situational irony also is at work in the deaths of Claudius and Laertes. Claudius and Laertes plan to kill Hamlet by poisoning the tip of Laertes's sword. They also have a backup plan: a cup of poisoned wine to offer the prince. After Laertes wounds Hamlet, the swords accidentally get switched and Laertes is wounded with his own poisoned weapon. Gertrude toasts Hamlet by drinking some of the poisoned wine. Distraught that everything is going wrong, Laertes confesses, and Hamlet then strikes Claudius with the poisoned sword and forces him to drink the last of the wine. Finally, Hamlet lies dying. His death suggests that not only is death inevitable, but it truly waits for no man.

Act 5, Scene 2

In the final scene, all are back at Elsinore Castle. Hamlet gives Horatio the details of the failed journey to England. He describes discovering that the papers carried by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern called for Hamlet's death. Hamlet tells Horatio that he **replaced** the original documents with forgeries that called for the bearers to be put to death—and that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were carrying them when the pirates captured Hamlet.

A courtier, **Osric**, approaches Horatio and Hamlet with a message for Hamlet from the king. Osric tells Hamlet that he has been **invited** to test his skills in a friendly

duel with Laertes. Claudius wagers against Hamlet's abilities and wishes to know if Hamlet will **accept** the challenge. Hamlet **does**.

People **gather** for the duel: **Claudius, Gertrude, Laertes, Hamlet, Horatio, and a number of lords and attendants**. Hamlet and Laertes shake hands, and Hamlet asks for Laertes's **forgiveness**.

The **duel** begins, and Hamlet **hits** Laertes. The king cheers on Hamlet and, with a false display of affection, drops a **poisoned** pearl into Hamlet's **cup** of wine. An attendant offers the cup to Hamlet, who waves him off. After Hamlet hits Laertes a **second** time, Gertrude reaches for the drink. Claudius attempts to stop her, but she insists and unknowingly **drinks** the poison. Yet again, Shakespeare uses dramatic irony to great effect, as Claudius **accidentally** murders his wife.

Laertes, becoming desperate, finally scores a **hit** on Hamlet. A scuffle ensues, the foils are exchanged, and, as the duel resumes, Hamlet makes his **third** hit on Laertes—this time with the poisoned foil. Before anything more can occur, the queen succumbs to the poison she has drunk and collapses. Laertes, realizing that **he has been hit by his own poisoned foil**, cries out that he has been killed by his own **treachery**. On the heels of his words, the queen **realizes** what is happening, exclaims that the drink has been poisoned, and dies.

Hamlet calls for the doors of the hall to **be locked** at once and demands they get to the cause of the treachery. Laertes speaks up in his final moments, informing everyone that **he and Hamlet have been poisoned by the foil**, that Gertrude has also been **poisoned**, and that the king is to **blame**. In a fury, Hamlet hits the king with the **tainted foil** and forces him to **drink** from the poisoned cup. Claudius soon dies. Laertes calls out, begging Hamlet's **forgiveness** and saying that if they forgive each other, neither his nor his father's death will be on Hamlet and Hamlet's death will not be on him. They agree as Laertes closes his **eyes**.

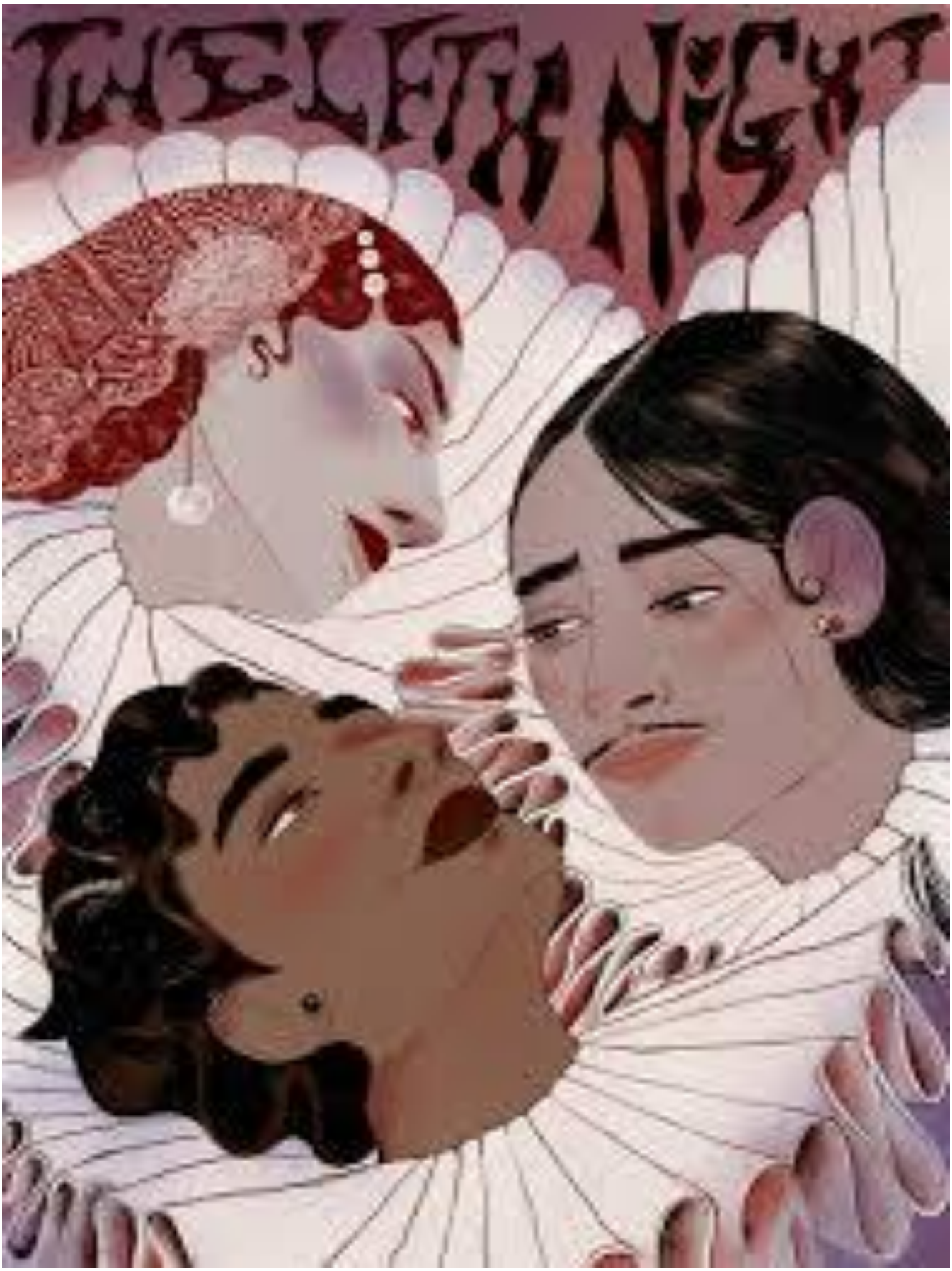
Hamlet, now failing, bids his dead mother goodbye and collapses. Horatio comforts him and attempts to **drink** the last of the wine, but Hamlet stops him. Hamlet **implores** Horatio to live on and, if he loved him, to take his **story** to the **world**.

Sounds in the castle announce the return of **Fortinbras from Poland** and the arrival of the English ambassadors. Hamlet prophesizes that Fortinbras will become king of Denmark. As he dies, Fortinbras and the ambassadors enter, shocked at the carnage around them. Horatio tells the arrivals what has occurred, and Fortinbras asks that Hamlet be borne away with the honor of a soldier.

Symbol:

Fencing Swords

Fencing swords in Hamlet have been used in the final scene during the duel between Laertes and Hamlet. The fencing swords point to the approach of the end of Hamlet's quest and resultant deaths. The fencing sword is a sign of a person having courage, bravery and the will to exact revenge. As both the characters engaged in fencing swords have some cause, and also have their honors at stake, they come to fight a duel in which both are killed. Therefore, fencing swords symbolize violence and deaths in the play.


TWELFTH NIGHT

William Shakespeare's Twelfth Night

Key Facts

Main ideas Key Facts

full title · *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*

author · William Shakespeare

type of work · Play

genre · Comedy

language · English

time and place written · Between 1600 and 1602, England

date of first publication · 1623, in the First Folio

publisher · Isaac Jaggard and Edward Blount

tone · Light, cheerful, comic; occasionally frantic and melodramatic, especially in the speeches of Orsino and Olivia

tense · Present (the entire story is told through dialogue)

setting (time) · Unknown

setting (place) · The mythical land of Illyria (Illyria is a real place, corresponding to the coast of present-day Albania—but *Twelfth Night* is clearly set in a fictional kingdom rather than a real one)

protagonist · Viola

major conflict · Viola is in love with Orsino, who is in love with Olivia, who is in love with Viola's male disguise, Cesario. This love triangle is complicated by the fact that neither Orsino nor Olivia knows that Viola is really a woman.

rising action · The mounting confusion, mistaken identities, and professions of love leading up to Act V

climax · Sebastian and Viola are reunited, and everyone realizes that Viola is really a woman

falling action · Viola prepares to marry Orsino; Malvolio is freed and vows revenge; everyone else goes off to celebrate

themes · Love as a cause of suffering; the uncertainty of gender; the folly of ambition

motifs · Letters, messages, and tokens; madness; disguises; mistaken identity

symbols · Olivia's gifts; the darkness of Malvolio's prison; changes of clothing

foreshadowing · The role of love and use of disguises; patient love vs. fickle love; arrival of Sebastian, mistaken identities, and the reunification of the twins.

Twelfth Night

Plot Overview

In the kingdom of Illyria, Duke Orsino is hopelessly in love with Lady Olivia, who is mourning her brother and refuses to marry anyone. Meanwhile, a young woman named Viola survives a shipwreck but believes her twin brother, Sebastian, has drowned. Lost in a strange land, Viola decides to disguise herself as a man named Cesario to find work and ends up serving Duke Orsino. Viola grows fond of Orsino, but her secret identity complicates her feelings. Orsino, unaware of her true identity, sends Cesario to woo Olivia on his behalf. However, Olivia falls in love with Cesario, not knowing she is actually Viola. This creates a love triangle where Viola loves Orsino, Orsino loves Olivia, and Olivia loves Cesario, leaving everyone confused and heartbroken.

In Olivia's household, her mischievous uncle, Sir Toby, and his friend, Sir Andrew, cause trouble along with Maria, Olivia's clever maid. Together, they play a cruel prank on Malvolio, Olivia's strict steward, by making him believe Olivia loves him. Malvolio behaves oddly and is locked in a dark room as punishment. Meanwhile, Sebastian, who is alive, arrives in Illyria with his friend Antonio. Mistaken identities lead to chaos when Olivia mistakes Sebastian for Cesario and marries him. In the end, Sebastian and Viola are reunited, and Viola's true identity is revealed. Orsino realizes he loves Viola and asks her to marry him. The confusion is cleared, Malvolio is released, and the couples celebrate, except for the bitter Malvolio, who storms away.

Character List

Viola - A young woman of aristocratic birth, and the play's protagonist. Washed up on the shore of Illyria when her ship is wrecked in a storm, Viola decides to make her own way in the world. She disguises herself as a young man, calling herself "Cesario," and becomes a page to Duke Orsino. She ends up falling in love with Orsino—even as Olivia, the woman Orsino is courting, falls in love with Cesario. Thus, Viola finds that her clever disguise has entrapped her: she cannot tell Orsino that she loves him, and she cannot tell Olivia why she, as Cesario, cannot love *her*. Her poignant plight is the central conflict in the play.

Orsino - A powerful nobleman in the country of Illyria. Orsino is lovesick for the beautiful Lady Olivia, but becomes more and more fond of his handsome new page boy, Cesario, who is actually a woman—Viola. Orsino is a vehicle through which the play explores the absurdity of love: a supreme egotist, Orsino mopes around complaining how heartsick he is over Olivia, when it is clear that he is chiefly in love with the idea of being in love and enjoys making a spectacle of himself. His attraction to the ostensibly male Cesario injects sexual ambiguity into his character.

Olivia - A wealthy, beautiful, and noble Illyrian lady, Olivia is courted by Orsino and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, but to each of them she insists that she is in mourning for her brother, who has recently died, and will not marry for seven years. She and Orsino are similar characters in that each seems to enjoy wallowing in his or her own misery. Viola's arrival in the masculine guise of Cesario enables Olivia to break free of her self-indulgent melancholy. Olivia seems to have no difficulty transferring her affections from one love interest to the next, however, suggesting that her romantic feelings—like most emotions in the play—do not run deep.

Sebastian - Viola's lost twin brother. When he arrives in Illyria, traveling with Antonio, his close friend and protector, Sebastian discovers that many people think that they know him. Furthermore, the beautiful Lady Olivia, whom he has never met, wants to marry him. Sebastian is not as well rounded a character as his sister. He seems to exist to take on the role that Viola fills while disguised as Cesario—namely, the mate for Olivia.

Malvolio - The straitlaced steward—or head servant—in the household of Lady Olivia. Malvolio is very efficient but also very self-righteous, and he has a poor opinion of

drinking, singing, and fun. His priggishness and haughty attitude earn him the enmity of Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Maria, who play a cruel trick on him, making him believe that Olivia is in love with him. In his fantasies about marrying his mistress, he reveals a powerful ambition to rise above his social class.

Feste - The clown, or fool, of Olivia's household, Feste moves between Olivia's and Orsino's homes. He earns his living by making pointed jokes, singing old songs, being generally witty, and offering good advice cloaked under a layer of foolishness. In spite of being a professional fool, Feste often seems the wisest character in the play.

Sir Toby - Olivia's uncle. Olivia lets Sir Toby Belch live with her, but she does not approve of his rowdy behavior, practical jokes, heavy drinking, late-night carousing, or friends (specifically the idiotic Sir Andrew). Sir Toby also earns the ire of Malvolio. But Sir Toby has an ally, and eventually a mate, in Olivia's sharp-witted waiting-gentlewoman, Maria. Together they bring about the triumph of chaotic spirit, which Sir Toby embodies, and the ruin of the controlling, self-righteous Malvolio.

Maria - Olivia's clever, daring young waiting-gentlewoman. Maria is remarkably similar to her antagonist, Malvolio, who harbors aspirations of rising in the world through marriage. But Maria succeeds where Malvolio fails—perhaps because she is a woman, but, more likely, because she is more in tune than Malvolio with the anarchic, topsy-turvy spirit that animates the play.

Sir Andrew Aguecheek - A friend of Sir Toby's. Sir Andrew Aguecheek attempts to court Olivia, but he doesn't stand a chance. He thinks that he is witty, brave, young, and good at languages and dancing, but he is actually an idiot.

Antonio - A man who rescues Sebastian after his shipwreck. Antonio has become very fond of Sebastian, caring for him, accompanying him to Illyria, and furnishing him with money—all because of a love so strong that it seems to be romantic in nature. Antonio's attraction to Sebastian, however, never bears fruit. Despite the ambiguous and shifting gender roles in the play, Twelfth Night remains a romantic comedy in which the characters are destined for marriage. In such a world, homoerotic attraction cannot be fulfilled.

Twelfth Night

Act 1

DUKE ORSINO

"If music be the food of love, play on;
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die." (I.i)

Orsino's command to "play on" reveals a man who is not in love with a person, but with the *sensation* of love itself. By calling music the "food of love," he frames desire as a physical appetite that can be manipulated. His strategy is one of **surfeit**: he believes that by overindulging in his melancholic emotions, he can force his "appetite" to sicken and die, thereby curing his heartache. This introduces a paradoxical view of love as both a source of pleasure and a disease or "pestilence."

Furthermore, the imagery is strikingly predatory. Orsino shifts from viewing love as a passive hunger to describing himself as a "hart" (a male deer) hunted by his own "fell and cruel hounds." This suggests that his self-indulgent melancholy has become a trap of his own making. For students, this quote is the primary evidence that Illyria is a world of **instability**, where characters are intoxicated by their own rhetoric and high-flown performances of emotion.

Why is Olivia melancholy at the beginning of the play?

At the start of the play, Olivia mourns her brother's death. Valentine explains to Orsino why Olivia won't return Orsino's romantic feelings, claiming that Olivia has vowed to wear a dark veil for seven years so no one can see her face or marry her. Later, Olivia herself tells the clown Feste that she is mourning her brother's death, and that grief makes her melancholy. The loss of Olivia's brother creates a thematic link between the love she felt for her brother, and the deep fraternal love between the twins Sebastian and Viola. However, Olivia's excessive and melodramatic mourning shows that she is somewhat self-indulgent and preoccupied with her own feelings. The disorderly behavior in Olivia's household (drunkenness, practical jokes, and general chaos) possibly comes from Olivia indulging in grief rather than upholding her responsibilities.

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The Uncertainty of Gender

In Twelfth Night, the uncertainty of gender is not merely a plot device for comedy, but a profound exploration of the fluidity of human identity. This theme is anchored in the character of Viola, whose transformation into Cesario creates a "liminal" space where gender is stripped of its fixed biological markers and redefined as a performance.

When Orsino remarks that Cesario's features are "semblative a woman's part," Shakespeare highlights the irony that gender is often perceived through outward "signs"—voice, complexion, and dress—rather than essence. This creates a psychological "trap" for the characters: Olivia falls in love with the feminine wit of a "man," while Orsino becomes increasingly intimate with a "boy" who possesses a woman's soul. These attractions suggest that love in Illyria is androgynous; it responds to the person's spirit rather than their binary category.

For university students, the crucial takeaway is that Viola/Cesario acts as a mirror, reflecting the true desires of those around her. By "blurring the lines," she proves that gender roles are socially constructed "masks" that can be put on or taken off. The uncertainty of gender ultimately suggests that identity is unstable, and that human connection often transcends the physical boundaries of male and female.

What Does “Twelfth Night” Refer To?

The title **"Twelfth Night"** is deeply significant, carrying religious, social, and thematic meanings that set the stage for the play's chaos and subversion of norms.

1. Religious Meaning

The title refers to the Feast of the Epiphany, which occurs on the twelfth night after Christmas (January 6th). In the Christian calendar, this marks the end of the holiday season and commemorates the visit of the Magi (the Three Kings) to the baby Jesus. Historically, it was a time of celebration, marking the transition from the sacred holiday back to ordinary life.

2. Social Meaning

In Elizabethan England, "Twelfth Night" was a festival of **Misrule**. It was a day when social hierarchies were flipped upside down:

*The "Lord of Misrule": A commoner or servant would be appointed to "rule" the festivities, mocking the nobility.

*Social Inversion: Servants dressed as masters, and men often dressed as women (which mirrors Viola’s disguise as Cesario).

*The Spirit of Carnival: It was a time for "cakes and ale," excessive drinking, and practical jokes—all of which are embodied in the play by characters like Sir Toby Belch and Maria.

3. Why this name?

Shakespeare chose this title to signal the **atmosphere** of the play rather than a specific date in the plot.

- **The "Lord of Misrule" Theme:** The title prepares the audience for a world where "nothing that is so is so." It justifies the madness of the love triangle and the cruel trick played on Malvolio.
- **The Subtitle "What You Will":** The full title is *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*. This suggests that the play is whatever the audience wants it to be—a light comedy, a social satire, or a bittersweet story about identity.
- **Final Revelry:** Just as the real Twelfth Night is the "last blast" of fun before the somber season of Lent, the play represents a final moment of chaotic joy before the characters must settle into the "ordered" world of marriage and social responsibility.

Act 2

Meanwhile, Viola's twin brother, Sebastian, has also survived their shipwreck, but like Viola he believes his sibling has been drowned at sea. And, like Viola, he decides to head for Orsino's court. Antonio, who has enemies at Orsino's court, nevertheless resolves to follow his master there.

Malvolio catches up with Cesario, and presents the ring to 'him', which Cesario denies having dropped at Olivia's. When Malvolio has gone, Viola wonders why Olivia sent Malvolio after her with the ring. She realises that Olivia loves her as Cesario. Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Feste drunkenly sing at Olivia's, rousing both Maria and Malvolio, who tells Sir Toby that Olivia is getting tired of his behaviour and would be glad to see him gone from her house. When Malvolio has gone, Maria tells Sir Toby and Sir Andrew how she dislikes Malvolio's vanity and self-regard, and that she plans to bring him down a peg or two. She hatches a plot to leave love letters in Malvolio's chamber, written in what looks to be Olivia's handwriting (but is really Maria's).

Analysis

It is useful to understand the function of a soliloquy in drama. Sometimes a playwright cannot include important information about character or plot in the dialogue, so a soliloquy may become necessary. Soliloquy is the act of talking to oneself, silently or aloud. In drama it denotes the convention by which a character, alone on the stage, utters his thoughts aloud; the playwright uses this device as a convenient way to convey directly to the audience information about a character's motives, intentions, and state of mind, as well as for purposes of general exposition. In this scene, Cesario certainly makes an important commentary about the love situation while alone on stage. A soliloquy like the one he utters is true to the character of Cesario we've seen so far. His words continue to reflect his role as representative of the practical, commonsense aspect of love in this play. He very logically takes account of Olivia and Orsino's feelings. True, he may be capable of such intense feelings for another person, but he realizes that people have to get along in the real world each day, too. This play gives us the feeling that the depiction of love would somehow be incomplete if it emphasized just the romance and passion of Orsino and Olivia's feelings. Love can still see the beloved as an ordinary human being. Critics have argued over how to interpret Malvolio. The issue relates to Malvolio's character and the significance of the comic plot centered on him. Consider how dutiful and nonchalant he appears in this scene. He brings the ring, delivers Olivia's message, and takes off. We can start to form our opinion of his character.

In his soliloquy, Cesario repeats the motif of “appearances versus reality.” Every instance of a motif should enhance our understanding of the playwright’s views on that particular subject.

Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.
How easy is it for the proper false
In women’s waxen hearts to set their forms!

This soliloquy from Act 2, Scene 2, represents Viola’s anagnorisis—her moment of critical realization regarding the moral and emotional consequences of her deception. By labeling disguise as a "wickedness," Viola shifts the perspective of the play from lighthearted comedy to a darker exploration of the instability of identity.

When she mentions the "pregnant enemy," she is likely referring to Satan or the inherent "craftiness" of deception, suggesting that once a lie is born, it takes on a life of its own that the creator can no longer control. The metaphor of "women’s waxen hearts" is particularly significant for university-level analysis. It reflects the Elizabethan view of women as physically and emotionally "malleable" or soft, like wax. Viola laments how easily a "proper false" (a handsome but fake exterior) can leave a permanent impression on a woman’s heart.

The tragedy here lies in the irony of the self: Viola is criticizing the very disguise that saved her. She realizes that her "false" masculinity has trapped Olivia in a hopeless attraction and prevented Orsino from seeing her true self. This speech serves as a warning that while masks provide safety, they also distort reality, making the heart a victim of "what it sees" rather than "what is true."

Love and Desire

In Twelfth Night, Shakespeare presents love not as a fixed, romantic ideal, but as a fluid, often erratic force that borders on psychological instability. The play explores various dimensions of desire, ranging from the performative to the practical.

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1. Love as a Narcissistic Appetite (Orsino)

For Duke Orsino, love is a self-indulgent "appetite." He is the Petrarchan Lover who enjoys the feeling of being in love more than the object of his affection. His language is full of sensory excess—music, flowers, and poetry—suggesting that his desire is a form of emotional theater. To Orsino, love is a "pestilence" or a predator that "hunts" him, placing him in a passive role where he wallows in his own refined suffering.

2. Love as a Sudden "Plague" (Olivia)

Olivia’s transition from a vow of seven-year mourning to a sudden obsession with Cesario highlights the unpredictability of desire. She describes her attraction to Cesario as something that crept in through her eyes like a "plague." This suggests that in Illyria, love is an external force that strikes without warning, stripping the individual of their logic and social vows.

3. Love as Service and Sacrifice (Viola)

Viola represents the most authentic form of love in the play. Her desire for Orsino is grounded in sacrifice and silence. While Orsino and Olivia "perform" their emotions loudly, Viola must hide hers behind the mask of Cesario. Her love is tested by her duty; she is forced to woo another woman for the man she loves. This creates a "barful strife" that elevates her love from mere infatuation to a profound emotional endurance.

Act 3

As Orsino and Cesario listen to music, it becomes obvious that Cesario – i.e. Viola – loves Orsino. Orsino sends Cesario to Olivia again, with a jewel for a gift. Meanwhile, Maria's plan to make a fool of Malvolio begins to come to fruition: Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Fabian (another member of Olivia's household) conceal themselves in a box-tree while Malvolio prances about, talking to himself, convinced that Olivia loves him. Malvolio imagines what it would be like to be married to Olivia and thus be able to lord it over her uncle, Sir Toby Belch; from their concealment in the tree, Sir Toby and his friends take exception to Malvolio's arrogance. Malvolio then discovers a letter, forged by Maria, but purporting to be in Olivia's handwriting; the letter makes Malvolio think that Olivia wants him to be cross-gartered and wear yellow stockings, so he resolves to get kitted out in such clothes to impress her. The letter also suggests that Malvolio smile in Olivia's presence, so that she might discreetly know he returns her affections. When Malvolio is gone, Sir Toby and the others laugh at Malvolio's gullibility.

Viola, as Cesario, has another audience with Olivia, during which Olivia confesses her love for 'him'. Cesario rebuffs her, and leaves. Sir Andrew Aguecheek, who walked in on them, complains to Sir Toby and Fabian that Olivia, who spurns his advances, was bestowing her affection upon a mere servant. Sir Toby and Fabian persuade Sir Andrew to write a letter challenging Cesario to a duel: they say that Olivia is bound to be impressed by his valour. When he's gone, Maria arrives to tell Sir Toby and Fabian that Malvolio has acted upon the advice in the forged letter, and is cross-gartered and wearing yellow stockings.

Olivia speaks with Malvolio, and is shocked by his attire and his perpetual smiling. She leaves to welcome Cesario back, and Sir Toby, Maria, and Fabian confront Malvolio, pretending to think him mad. Malvolio leaves, and Sir Andrew appears with his letter of challenge drafted for Cesario, challenging 'him' to a duel over Olivia. Once Sir Andrew has left to await Cesario, Sir Toby reveals that he will not deliver the letter to Cesario, but instead goes and tells 'him' about Sir Andrew's challenge in person. Cesario retreats into the house, but Sir Andrew pursues him. They go to duel, but just as they are drawing their swords, Antonio shows up, thinking he's found Sebastian – because 'Cesario' looks exactly the same! Antonio is arrested for piracy, leaving Viola hoping that her brother really is alive.

Character	Type of Love	Key Characteristic
Orsino	Petrarchan / Narcissistic	In love with the *idea* of love; seeks excess.
Olivia	Sudden / Obsessive	Love as a "plague" that breaks social vows.
Viola	Altruistic / Silent	Love as sacrifice; grounded in truth and patience.
Sir Toby	Materialistic / Carnal	Love of "cakes and ale" and social misrule.

How does Maria impress the other members of Olivia's household?

Maria impresses Sir Toby and Sir Andrew by engineering a clever idea to trick Malvolio, whom none of them like because Malvolio spoils their fun. After Maria proposes her plan to forge love letters to Malvolio from Olivia, Sir Andrew praises Maria by saying "she's a good wench" (2.3.). Later, Sir Toby states that he is so impressed with Maria's trick he wants to marry her, with Sir Andrew agreeing. Sir Toby does in fact go on to marry Maria. Maria's plan to trick Malvolio might not be very kind, but the plan is intelligent, shrewd, and funny. By marrying Maria, Sir Toby acknowledges that he admires these qualities in a woman, mirroring Orsino's admiration of Viola's courage and intelligence. The plotlines around both Maria and Viola show that assertive, risk-taking female characters can win the respect of men around them.

Love as a Cause of Suffering

Twelfth Night is a romantic comedy, and romantic love is the play's main focus. Despite the fact that the play offers a happy ending, in which the various lovers find one another and achieve wedded bliss, Shakespeare shows that love can cause pain. Many of the characters seem to view love as a kind of curse, a feeling that attacks its victims suddenly and disruptively. Various characters claim to suffer painfully from being in love, or, rather, from the pangs of unrequited love. At one point, Orsino depicts love dolefully as an "appetite" that he wants to satisfy and cannot at another point, he calls his desires "fell and cruel hounds" . Olivia more bluntly describes love as a "plague" from which she suffers terribly. These metaphors contain an element of violence, further painting the love-struck as victims of some random force in the universe. Even the less melodramatic Viola sighs unhappily that "My state is desperate for

my master's love" (II.ii.35). This desperation has the potential to result in violence—as in Act V, scene i, when Orsino threatens to kill Cesario because he thinks that -Cesario has forsaken him to become Olivia's lover.

Love is also exclusionary: some people achieve romantic happiness, while others do not. At the end of the play, as the happy lovers rejoice, both Malvolio and Antonio are prevented from having the objects of their desire. Malvolio, who has pursued Olivia, must ultimately face the realization that he is a fool, socially unworthy of his noble mistress. Antonio is in a more difficult situation, as social norms do not allow for the gratification of his apparently sexual attraction to Sebastian. Love, thus, cannot conquer all obstacles, and those whose desires go unfulfilled remain no less in love but feel the sting of its absence all the more severely.

Act 4

At the beginning of Act Four, Feste finds Sebastian and mistakes him for Cesario/Viola. He drags him to Olivia's house, despite Sebastian protesting that he doesn't know Feste. Once they arrive, Sir Andrew and Sir Toby mistake Sebastian for Cesario as well. This is especially confusing for Sir Andrew, since Cesario/Viola just ran off looking for a clue of Sebastian in the last act. Sir Andrew attacks Sebastian, and promptly gets a beat down for his efforts. Sir Toby jumps in to help, but Olivia breaks up the fight and invites Sebastian in, mistaking him for Cesario again. Despite the fact that Sebastian has no idea what is going on, he heads into Olivia's house.

The joke on Malvolio continues to play on, with Maria, Feste, Sir Toby, and Sir Andrew locking Malvolio in a dark room and stating that he is insane. At Maria's urging, Feste assumes the identity of a priest and speaks with Malvolio, altering his voice so that Malvolio doesn't know who he is. Malvolio tells the supposed priest that he is locked in this dark room, and the 'priest' tells him that the room is sunny and light and that he must be insane. Sir Toby starts to realize that the joke has gone on long enough, and the group allows Malvolio to write a letter to Olivia asking to be released.

While this is happening, Sebastian is being given gifts by Olivia and walking around the house with her. He vaguely remembers that he hasn't seen Antonio for a while, but is distracted by

Olivia. She suggests that they get married since she has a priest in the house ready to go. Despite the fact that Sebastian had never met her until that day, he agrees.

Act 5

Orsino confronts Antonio for his crimes, and when Olivia arrives and rejects Orsino's advances again, he denounces her. Olivia, believing she is speaking to her newlywed husband Sebastian, is amazed when Viola (as Cesario) professes her love for Orsino. Olivia demands Cesario remains behind when 'he' goes to follow Orsino, and calls upon the priest who married her to Sebastian to confirm that they are married. Orsino believes that Cesario has betrayed him and married the woman he loves, and flies into a rage again. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, having been beaten up by Sebastian, turn up and accuse Cesario of having done it. Thankfully, Sebastian then arrives and when everyone sees him and Cesario/Viola in the same place, the confusion is cleared up. Malvolio is brought out of his cell, and confronts Olivia about the letter he thinks she wrote to him, professing her love and asking him to dress cross-gartered in yellow stockings. Olivia, seeing the letter, recognises it is Maria's handwriting, made to look like her own. Malvolio, realising he's been duped and that his mistress does not love him, storms off, announcing he will have his revenge on them all. With Viola's true identity now revealed, she and Orsino agree to be married. Twelfth Night ends with Feste singing a song, 'When that I was and a little tiny boy'.

Genre

Comedy

Twelfth Night can be considered a model Shakespearean comedy in that it employs nearly every feature of the genre: a wedding, mistaken identities, misunderstandings, physical comedy, and a happy ending. Like all of Shakespeare's comedies, the play ends with a wedding – in this case, the joint wedding of two sets of lovers: Olivia and Sebastian, and Viola and Orsino. Also as in many other comedies, the lovers are initially kept apart through misunderstandings, which lead to plot complications. Olivia falls in love with Cesario, (who is really Viola in drag,) but Viola can't return Olivia's love. Similarly, Viola falls in love with Orsino, who, believing Viola is Cesario, refuses to return her love. Only once true identities are revealed can the lovers unite with their appropriate partners. In addition to the preposterous plot, cross-dressing, and misunderstandings, the play abounds in silliness. While the main characters are pursuing the wrong partners, the Fool, Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew provide plenty of comic relief in the form of ridiculous rhymes, songs, double entendre, and antics.Shakespearean comedies often take place in societies where the social order is out of whack.

Motifs

Letters, Messages, and Tokens

Twelfth Night features a great variety of messages sent from one character to another—sometimes as letters and other times in the form of tokens. Such messages are used both for purposes of communication and miscommunication—sometimes deliberate and sometimes accidental. Maria's letter to Malvolio, which purports to be from Olivia, is a deliberate (and successful) attempt to trick the steward. Sir Andrew's letter demanding a duel with Cesario, meanwhile, is meant seriously, but because it is so appallingly stupid, Sir Toby does not deliver it, rendering it extraneous. Malvolio's missive, sent by way of Feste from the dark room in which he is imprisoned, ultimately works to undo the confusion caused by Maria's forged letter and to free Malvolio from his imprisonment.

But letters are not the only kind of messages that characters employ to communicate with one another. Individuals can be employed in the place of written communication—Orsino repeatedly

sends Cesario, for instance, to deliver messages to Olivia. Objects can function as messages between people as well: Olivia sends Malvolio after Cesario with a ring, to tell the page that she loves him, and follows the ring up with further gifts, which symbolize her romantic attachment. Messages can convey important information, but they also create the potential for miscommunication and confusion—especially with characters like Maria and Sir Toby manipulating the information.

Madness

No one is truly insane in Twelfth Night, yet a number of characters are accused of being mad, and a current of insanity or zaniness runs through the action of the play. After Sir Toby and Maria dupe Malvolio into believing that Olivia loves him, Malvolio behaves so bizarrely that he is assumed to be mad and is locked away in a dark room. Malvolio himself knows that he is sane, and he accuses everyone around him of being mad. Meanwhile, when Antonio encounters Viola (disguised as Cesario), he mistakes her for Sebastian, and his angry insistence that she recognize him leads people to assume that he is mad. All of these incidents feed into the general atmosphere of the play, in which normal life is thrown topsy-turvy, and everyone must confront a reality that is somehow fractured.

Disguises

Many characters in Twelfth Night assume disguises, beginning with Viola, who puts on male attire and makes everyone else believe that she is a man. By dressing his protagonist in male garments, Shakespeare creates endless sexual confusion with the Olivia-Viola--Orsino love triangle. Other characters in disguise include Malvolio, who puts on crossed garters and yellow stockings in the hope of winning Olivia, and Feste, who dresses up as a priest—Sir Topas—when he speaks to Malvolio after the steward has been locked in a dark room. Feste puts on the disguise even though Malvolio will not be able to see him, since the room is so dark, suggesting that the importance of clothing is not just in the eye of the beholder. For Feste, the disguise completes his assumption of a new identity—in order to be Sir Topas, he must look like Sir Topas. Viola puts on new clothes and changes her gender, while Feste and Malvolio put on new garments either to impersonate a nobleman (Feste) or in the hopes of becoming a nobleman (Malvolio). Through these disguises, the play raises questions about what makes us

who we are, compelling the audience to wonder if things like gender and class are set in stone, or if they can be altered with a change of clothing.

Mistaken Identity

The instances of mistaken identity are related to the prevalence of disguises in the play, as Viola's male clothing leads to her being mistaken for her brother, Sebastian, and vice versa. Sebastian is mistaken for Viola (or rather, Cesario) by Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, and then by Olivia, who promptly marries him. Meanwhile, Antonio mistakes Viola for Sebastian, and thinks that his friend has betrayed him when Viola claims to not know him. These cases of mistaken identity, common in Shakespeare's comedies, create the tangled situation that can be resolved only when Viola and Sebastian appear together, helping everyone to understand what has happened.

Foreshadowing

The role of love, the use of disguises.

Perhaps the most important force at work in Twelfth Night is erotic desire and the many forms it assumes. This theme is often expressed literally through the outward disguises of characters. Shakespeare immediately introduces the mechanics of this theme with the first lines spoken by Duke Orsino in Act I, scene i: "Oh spirit of love! How quick and fresh art thou, /…So full of shapes is fancy, / that it alone is high fantastical." (I.i.). This quote introduces the outsized role of love in the play. The mention of 'fancy,' which here means love, as full of shapes sets up the prospect of love and Eros assuming unrecognizable forms. The soliloquy prepares the audience for the entrance of Viola, whose disguise as Cesario introduces an unexpected love triangle. Orsino's soliloquy portrays love as one of the primary movers of the play. We understand that some characters will function less as autonomous, free-willed agents and more as participants, buffeted by a power outside of their control. Sure enough, Orsino and Olivia shift easily from one love to another, and Malvolio falls for Olivia quite suddenly.

Madness

My masters are you mad? Or what are you? Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty, but to gabble like tinkers at this time of night? (II.iii.)

Here, Malvolio admonishes Sir Toby and Sir Andrew for their drunken rowdiness. He even goes so far as to suggest that their roguish behavior and blatant disregard for others is a sign of madness. Malvolio's attitude becomes significant as later in the play, Sir Toby enacts his revenge on Malvolio by making him appear mad in Olivia's company, essentially forcing on Malvolio some of his own medicine, albeit in a much larger dose. Madness has a more liberal sense here, and seems to include anything that falls outside the bounds of civil order.

Sir Topas, never was a man thus wronged. Good Sir Topas, do not think I am mad. They have laid me here in hideous darkness. (IV.ii.)

These lines are spoken by Malvolio once he has been imprisoned as a madman. In order to exploit the joke even further, Sir Toby pressures Feste to dress up as a priest and perform a mock-exorcism on Malvolio. The reference to darkness here is significant as it not only refers to the physical darkness of the prison itself but is also a figurative allusion to madness as a state of confusion. Indeed, Malvolio is not the one who is mad (as he rightly points out) but those around him; everything has been turned upside down. Civility has been pushed aside so that other characters in *Twelfth Night* can freely indulge in silly antics and ribaldry.

I am as mad as he,
If sad and merry madness equal be. (III.iv.)

In these lines Olivia suggests that she is as mad as Malvolio, who has been acting quite strangely after reading Maria's letter. However, Olivia makes a distinction here. Her "madness" functions as an expression of her love for Cesario, which remains unreturned and has plunged her into a state of deep melancholy. Hers is a gloomy madness, essentially stemming from a state of lovesickness, while Malvolio's is a merry kind, and originates instead from an over-inflated optimism, as he is convinced that Lady Olivia really loves him. This line is important as it links the theme of madness to lovesickness and melancholy, and suggests that romantic desire has the power to inhibit rational decision making. In this

way, the many raucous antics of *Twelfth Night* speak to the enormous influence of love and erotic desire in this play.

Fools and Foolishness

Quotes Fools and Foolishness

Lady, cucullus non facitmonachum; that's as much
to say as I wear not motley in my brain. (I.v.)

Here, Feste defends himself after Lady Olivia calls him a "dry fool" and insists that he be taken away. In Latin, Feste tells Olivia that "the cowl does not make a monk," essentially implying that she shouldn't judge a book by its cover. Just because Feste looks the part of a fool does not mean that he is actually foolish or unintelligent. As Feste insists, "he wears not motley in his brain," meaning that he still has his wits about him. As we quickly learn, Feste is the most intelligent and incisive character in *Twelfth Night*. His brand of foolishness consists of funny puns and innuendos, but these are often quite poignant. By masking his wisdom with "foolishness," Feste's biting commentary feels unassuming and can squeak by without eliciting offense from those in power.

This is a practice
As full of labour as a wise man's art,
For folly, that he wisely shows is fit,
But wise men, folly-fall'n, quite taint their wit (III.i.)

Here, Viola remarks that Feste's witticism requires a great deal of intelligence and skill, and is comparable to the work of a scholar or wise man. Viola is one of the few characters in the play who appreciate or understand the skill and wisdom that Feste possesses. She suggests that cleverly-placed foolishness reinforces one's claim to wisdom, whereas wise and prudent men who act foolishly do permanent damage to their reputation. The line can also be read as a reference to Malvolio, who throughout the first acts of the play adopts the affectation of a sober and highly-educated scholar, but does irreparable damage to himself once he exposes the vulgar scope of his ambitions. The line suggests there is more freedom in being overlooked by the world as a "fool," than being regarded as a wise man. And sure enough, among all the characters in *Twelfth Night*, Feste enjoys the full freedom to speak his mind.

Doubling

Twelfth Night is a play about doubles, and not just because it has a set of identical twins, Viola and Sebastian, at its centre. Olivia is in double mourning (she's lost both her father and brother), she has two aristocratic suitors (Duke Orsino and the hapless Sir Andrew Aguecheek), Sebastian has two admirers (Olivia, thinking him Cesario; and Antonio, who is suffering from no such delusion), Viola plays two parts, and so on. Even the role of music finds itself doubled in the two plots, with Orsino finding that music echoes the deep pangs of love he feels for Olivia, while the songs that Feste, Sir Toby Belch, and Sir Andrew Aguecheek sing also reflect love, albeit in a different register. The two meet in Feste, who sings for both Sir Toby and Sir Andrew ('O mistress mine') and Orsino ('Come away, come away, death'). This shows just how structurally well worked-out this is: perhaps of all of Shakespeare's comedies it is the most cleverly assembled, in that 'doubling' goes beyond simple dressing-up and the adopting of a handy disguise. Like the theme of disguise itself, doubling is ingrained within the fabric of the play at many levels.

In the last analysis, Twelfth Night endures as one of Shakespeare's most structurally effective comedies, but its japes involving cross-dressing and mistaken identity aren't merely there for comic effect, as they tend to be in his earlier 'double' play, The Comedy of Errors. Shakespeare is making some profound observations about love and deception, especially self-deception. Malvolio is deluded into thinking he can become a great man. Olivia is deceived by Viola's disguise. There is a vein of potential tragedy in all this, even while the play is celebratory and comic.

Love as a Cause of Suffering

Twelfth Night is a romantic comedy, and romantic love is the play's main focus. Despite the fact that the play offers a happy ending, in which the various lovers find one another and achieve wedded bliss, Shakespeare shows that love can cause pain. Many of the characters seem to view love as a kind of curse, a feeling that attacks its victims suddenly and disruptively. Various characters claim to suffer painfully from being in love, or, rather, from the pangs of unrequited love. At one point, Orsino depicts love dolefully as an "appetite" that he wants to satisfy and cannot (I.i.1–3); at another point, he calls his desires "fell and cruel hounds" (I.i.21). Olivia more bluntly describes love as a "plague" from which she suffers terribly (I.v.265). These metaphors contain an element of violence, further painting the love-struck as victims of some random force in the universe. Even the less melodramatic Viola sighs unhappily that "My state is desperate for my master's love" (II.ii.35). This desperation has the potential to result in violence—as in Act V, scene i, when Orsino threatens to kill Cesario because he thinks that -Cesario has forsaken him to become Olivia's lover.

Love is also exclusionary: some people achieve romantic happiness, while others do not. At the end of the play, as the happy lovers rejoice, both Malvolio and Antonio are prevented from having the objects of their desire. Malvolio, who has pursued Olivia, must ultimately face the realization that he is a fool, socially unworthy of his noble mistress. Antonio is in a more difficult situation, as social norms do not allow for the gratification of his apparently sexual attraction to Sebastian. Love, thus, cannot conquer all obstacles, and those whose desires go unfulfilled remain no less in love but feel the sting of its absence all the more severely.

The Uncertainty of Gender

Gender is one of the most obvious and much-discussed topics in the play. Twelfth Night is one of Shakespeare's so-called transvestite comedies, in which a female character—in this case, Viola—disguises herself as a man. This situation creates a sexual mess: Viola falls in love with Orsino but cannot tell him, because he thinks she is a man, while Olivia, the object of Orsino's affection, falls for Viola in her guise as Cesario. There is a clear homoerotic subtext here: Olivia

is in love with a woman, even if she thinks he is a man, and Orsino often remarks on Cesario's beauty, suggesting that he is attracted to Viola even before her male disguise is removed. This latent homoeroticism finds an explicit echo in the minor character of Antonio, who is clearly in love with his male friend, Sebastian. But Antonio's desires cannot be satisfied, while Orsino and Olivia both find tidy heterosexual gratification once the sexual ambiguities and deceptions are straightened out.

Twelfth Night | Symbols

Music

Act 1 of Twelfth Night opens with music playing and Orsino's first line ("If music be the food of love, play on") directly connecting music to love. Music serves as a symbol of love throughout the play. Orsino describes it as a way to nourish love. When Viola hatches her plan to become Orsino's page (she is aware one of her qualifications is "I can sing / And speak to him in many sorts of music / That will allow me very worth his service." When Viola (as Cesario) first meets Olivia, she says if she loved Olivia, she would "write loyal cantons of contemnèd love"—in other words, love songs. Orsino and Viola (as Cesario) have a love scene in which Viola confesses her love for Orsino (even though he doesn't recognize it). As Orsino requests, music is playing quietly throughout the scene. Orsino and Viola listen to the Fool sing a song about a "sad true lover" . They are true lovers, but Orsino doesn't realize it yet. When Viola (as Cesario) returns to Olivia's house to speak again for Orsino, she says if Cesario were instead to speak of another suit (i.e., his own), "I had rather hear you to solicit that / Than music from the spheres".

Jewelry

In Twelfth Night, jewelry serves as a concrete symbol of desire and affection. After Olivia first meets Cesario, she sends Malvolio after him to deliver a ring Cesario supposedly left behind. Viola knows the ring represents Olivia's love for Cesario. Olivia gives Viola (as Cesario) a "jewel" with her picture. Sebastian mentions Olivia gave him a pearl as a token of her affection.

In the Elizabethan era, jewelry was also used to reward servants or to mark their rank. When Malvolio fantasizes about being married to Olivia , his fantasies include possession of a watch and valuable jewels. As her steward, he would probably already be wearing a heavy gold chain. Valentine speaks of the "favors" Orsino has given to Viola. While the play does not specify what the favors are, they likely included a jewel or chain to indicate Cesario's status as a favorite servant.

Clothing

Clothing is a major symbol in Twelfth Night, serving as a guide to the wearer's character or—in the case of Viola, Olivia, Malvolio, and the Fool—as a disguise of real character. The play's plot turns on Viola's successful impersonation of a male page, Cesario, when she arrives at Orsino's court. Even though cross-dressing is helpful to her at first, it becomes a burden when she falls in love with Orsino and when Olivia falls in love with her (as Cesario). In Act 5, Scene 1, after all of the mistaken identities are finally cleared up, Viola makes a point of waiting to change into women's clothes before embracing her brother, Sebastian, and her beloved, Orsino.

Viola is not the only character who dresses purposefully inTwelfth Night. When Olivia first meets Cesario, she puts on her heavy mourning veil, immediately creating a barrier between her and Cesario—but a barrier she will happily discard when she falls in love with him. The trick played on Malvolio by Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Maria is dependent upon his greeting Olivia dressed in ridiculous, cross-gartered, yellow stockings (rather than his usual somber attire). In his case clothing serves to show him up for the fool he really is. Even the Fool puts on a disguise, dressing as the hermit Sir Topas when he comes to visit Malvolio in his dark room.

Mistaken Identity

The instances of mistaken identity are related to the prevalence of disguises in the play, as Viola’s male clothing leads to her being mistaken for her brother, Sebastian, and vice versa. Sebastian is mistaken for Viola (or rather, Cesario) by Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, and then by Olivia, who promptly marries him. Meanwhile, Antonio mistakes Viola for Sebastian, and thinks that his friend has betrayed him when Viola claims to not know him. These cases of mistaken identity, common in Shakespeare’s comedies, create the tangled situation that can be resolved only when Viola and Sebastian appear together, helping everyone to understand what has happened.