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Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, son of the late King Hamlet and Queen GertrudeQueen Gertrude, widow of King Hamlet, now married to ClaudiusKing Claudius, brother to the late King HamletPolonius, father of Ophelia and Laertes, councillor to King ClaudiusReynaldo, servant to PoloniusHoratio, Hamlet's friend and confidantcourtiers at the Danish courtFortinbras, Prince of Norwaya Captain in Fortinbras's armyAmbassadors to Denmark from EnglandPlayers who take the roles of Prologue, Player King, Player Queen, and Lucianus in The Murder of GonzagoAttendants, Lords, Guards, Musicians, Laertes's Followers, Soldiers, Officers Find out what's on, read our latest stories, and learn how you can get involved. Sign up Hamlet is a Black, Latinx prince in this bilingual reimaging of Shakespeare's tragedy, with text infused by the Spanish spoken in present-day New York City. After the staged reading, join us for a conversation with the Hamlet creative team—director Laurie Woolery, adapters Emily Lyon and Reynaldo Piniella, and translator Christine Eve Cato and actor Robert Ramirez, moderated by Executive Editor of DC Theater Arts Julian Quevedo. Access to all staged readings, panel discussions, workshops, and community celebrations included in the Festival. Students – Free admission to readings and conversations Admitted free one-half hour before event start time, with a valid student ID. This article is about Shakespeare's play. For other uses, see Hamlet (disambiguation). Hamlet one of William Shakespeare's plays and perhaps his most popular, and most puzzling. It follows the form of a "revenge tragedy", in which the hero, Hamlet, seeks vengeance against his father's murderer, his uncle Claudius, now the king of Denmark. Much of its fascination, however, lies in its uncertainties. Among these is the Ghost—Hamlet's father demanding justice, a tempting demon, an angelic messenger? Does Hamlet go mad, or merely pretend to? Once he is sure that Claudius is a murderer, why does he not act? Was his mother, Gertrude, unfaithful to her husband or complicit in his murder? Shakespeare is thought to have written Hamlet in 1599–1601. It was published as a quarto in 1603 and in a much fuller version in 1604–05. The 1623 First Folio version is much closer to the second quarto, but differs from it by hundreds of lines. There are thus three texts of the play. An earlier Hamlet play, now lost, may have been a major source. Sources may also include other contemporary works, including accounts of drinking at the Danish court and of "melancholy."[] Productions at the Folger Hamlet (Shakespeare's Globe, 2012) Helen Hayes Awards Wins: "Outstanding Supporting Performer, Non-Resident Production" for Christopher Saul. Nominations: "Outstanding Non-Resident Production", "Outstanding Lead Actor, Non-Resident Production" for Michael Benz, and "Outstanding Supporting Performer, Non-Resident Production" for Tom Lawrence Hamlet (Folger Theatre, 2010) Helen Hayes Awards Wins: "Outstanding Resident Play" and the "Robert Prosky Award for Outstanding Leading Actor, Resident Play" for Graham Michael Hamilton Nominations: "Outstanding Director, Resident Play" for Joseph Haj, "Outstanding Lighting Design, Resident Production" for Justin Townshend and "Outstanding Sound Design, Resident Production" for Matthew M. Nielson and Jack Herrick Hamlet (Folger Theatre, 1999) Early editions First Folio LUNA: First Folio: 2ndv - 2g1v Hamnet: STC 22273 Fo. 1 n. 68 Second Folio LUNA: Second Folio: 2p2v - 2r5v Hamnet: STC 22274 Fo. 2 n. 07 Second Quarto LUNA: Second Quarto Hamnet: STC 22276 Third Quarto LUNA: Third Quarto Hamnet: STC 22277 Copy 1 Fourth Quarto LUNA: Fourth Quarto Hamnet: STC 22278 Copy 1 Fifth Quarto LUNA: Fifth Quarto Hamnet: STC 22279 Copy 1 The title page of the 1604 Second Quarto Hamlet is printed in the 1623 First Folio. The title page of Hamlet printed in the 1623 First Folio, no.68. The 1632 Second Folio title page of Hamlet, STC 22274 Fo.2 no.07. The 1611 Third Quarto title page of Hamlet, STC 22277 copy 1. The title page of Hamlet printed in the 1625 Fourth Quarto, STC 22278 copy 1. The title page of Hamlet printed in the 1637 Fifth Quarto, STC 22279 copy 1. Modern editions Hamlet can be read online with Folger Digital Texts and purchased from Simon and Schuster. Hamnet link to Folger Edition: PR2807 .d2 M69 2012 In popular culture Books Ophelia's Fan (2005) by Christine Baltes The young adult novel follows the life of Irish Shakespearean actress, Harriet Smithson, who acted in many of Shakespeare's most famous female tragic roles—most notably, Ophelia—for a nineteenth century French audience. The Story of Edgar Sawtelle (2008) by David Wroblewski retells the tragic tale of Hamlet through the story of a young mute boy in Wisconsin, his dog Ophelia, and his attempt to prove his uncle murdered his father. Film Over the years, Hamlet has been one of Hollywood's favorite Shakespeare plays to make and remake. Below are videos of the "To be or not to be" speech from a select number of these adaptations for a comparison of the various flavors of these films. Sir Laurence Olivier performs the "To be or not to be" speech in his 1948 film performance in the title role of Hamlet. See Mel Gibson's rendition of the same speech in the 1990 film version directed by Franco Zeffirelli and starring Glenn Close as Gertrude. Kenneth Branagh directs and plays the title character in this 1996 Hamlet. Watch his version of the plays most famous speech below. Ethan Hawke rings in the new millennium by putting his spin on this classic speech, performing it in a video rental store in this 2000 adaptation. In this Royal Shakespeare Company stage to film production, David Tennant performs the role of Hamlet alongside Patrick Stewart as Claudius. Translations The Folger owns over 170 stand-alone translations of Hamlet in various languages (not including clothing catalogs). Cataloging of these works is ongoing as of early 2015, and many have full-level catalog records, but some works still have only partial records. Translations can be found Hamnet in by searching for "Translations in the Genre/Form Term field, or by searching the Call Number (Left-Anchored) field for call numbers starting with PR2796 (see the list of Sh.Col. translations call numbers for specific language call numbers). Since not all translations are fully cataloged, some items may only turn up in one of these searches. Performance materials Other media Audio edition Hamlet Audio Edition from Amazon & Schuster available on CD and as an audio download. CAST Hamlet Zach Appelman Claudius Ian Merrill Peaker Polonius Rick Foucheux Gertrude Karen Peaker Ophelia Emily Stark Laertes Aubrey Dekker Horatio Michael Brusasco Rosencrantz Chris Genebach Guildenstern Todd Schofield Other parts were played by members of the cast. Directed by Robert Richmond. Original music composed by Anthony Cochrane. In partnership with Simon & Schuster Audio Image Group Explore the curated image group for Hamlet in the Folger digital image collection. Content Advisory: this image group contains representations of suicide. Video Watch an introduction to Hamlet's plot and characters. Learn about Hamlet's journey from the cast and crew before the start of Hamlet set the stage for tragedy. When the king of Denmark, Prince Hamlet's father, suddenly dies, Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, marries his uncle Claudius, who becomes the new king.A spirit who claims to be the ghost of Hamlet's father describes his murder at the hands of Claudius and demands that Hamlet avenge the killing. When the counselor Polonius learns from his daughter, Ophelia, that Hamlet has visited her in an apparently distracted state, Polonius attributes the prince's condition to lovesickness, and he sets a trap for Hamlet using Ophelia as bait.To confirm Claudius's guilt, Hamlet arranges for a play that mimics the murder. Claudius's reaction is that of a guilty man. Hamlet, now free to act, mistakenly kills Polonius, thinking he is Claudius. Claudius sends Hamlet away as part of a deadly plot.After Polonius's death, Ophelia goes mad and later drowns. Hamlet, who has returned safely to confront the king, agrees to a fencing match with Ophelia's brother, Laertes, who secretly poisons his own rapier. At the match, Claudius prepares poisoned wine for Hamlet, which Gertrude unknowingly drinks; as she dies, she accuses Claudius, whom Hamlet kills. Then first Laertes and then Hamlet die, both victims of Laertes' rapier. Act 1, scene 1 On the guard's platform at Elsinore, Horatio waits with Barnardo and Marcellus to question a ghost that has twice before appeared. The Ghost, in the form of the late King Hamlet of Denmark, appears but will not speak. Horatio decides to tell his fellow student, Prince Hamlet, about the Ghost's appearance. Act 1, scene 2 In an audience chamber in Elsinore, Claudius, the new king of Denmark, holds court. 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Hamlet makes plans to join them that night. Act 1, scene 3 In Polonius's chambers, Laertes says good-bye to his sister, Ophelia, and tells her not to trust Hamlet's promises of love. Polonius joins them, sends Laertes off, then echoes Laertes's warnings to Ophelia, finally ordering her not to see Hamlet again. Act 1, scene 4 While Claudius drinks away the night, Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus are visited by the Ghost. It signals to Hamlet, Hamlet's friends try to stop his following the Ghost, but Hamlet will not be held back. Act 1, scene 5 The Ghost tells Hamlet a tale of horror. Saying that he is the spirit of Hamlet's father, he demands that Hamlet avenge King Hamlet's murder at the hands of Claudius. Hamlet, horrified, vows to "remember" and swears his friends to secrecy about what they have seen. Act 2, scene 1 Polonius sends his servant Reynaldo to Paris to question Laertes's acquaintances. Ophelia enters, deeply disturbed about a visit she has just had from an apparently mad Hamlet. Polonius decides that Hamlet has been made insane by Ophelia's refusing to see him. Polonius rushes off to tell the king. Act 2, scene 2 Claudius and Gertrude set Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two boyhood friends of Hamlet, to spy on him. When Hamlet himself enters, he is confronted first by Polonius and then by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, whom he quickly identifies as Claudius's spies. As they talk, a company of touring actors enters. Hamlet persuades one of them to deliver a speech, and recognizes, to his shame, that he has shown less intensity in avenging his father's murder than the actor has done in performance. Hamlet hopes that when the players stage The Murder of Gonzago for the court, he can determine whether Claudius is guilty of King Hamlet's death. 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ironically, one of murderous interruption and terrible incompleteness: Cut off, even in the blossoms of my sin, Unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd, And no reck'ning made, but sent to my account with all my imperfections Act 5 at last produces the formal reckoning of the imperfect account, yet it leaves Hamlet once again echoing the Ghost's agony of frustrated utterance. But what, we might ask, can there be left to tell, beyond what we have already seen and heard? It seems to be part of the point, a last reminder of Hamlet's elusive "mystery," that we shall never know. The Prince has, of course, insisted that Horatio remain behind "to tell my story"; but the inadequacy of Horatio's response only intensifies the sense of incompleteness. All that his stolid imagination can offer is that bald plot summary of "accidental judgments [and] casual slaughters," which, as Anne Barton protests, leaves out "everything that seems important" about the play and its protagonist. Nor is Fortinbras's attempt to make "The soldier's music and the rite of war / Speak loudly for [Hamlet]" (5.2.445-46) any more satisfactory, for the military strongman's cannon are no better tuned to speak for Hamlet than the player's pipe. It would be a mistake, of course, to underestimate the dramatic significance of Horatio's story or of the "music and the rite of war"—these last gestures of ritual consolation—especially in a play where, beginning with the obscene confusion of Claudius's "mirth in funeral" and including Polonius's "hugger-mugger" interment and Ophelia's "maimed rites," we have seen the dead repeatedly degraded by the slighting of their funeral poms. In this context it matters profoundly that Hamlet alone is accorded the full dignity of obsequies suited to his rank, for it signals his triumph over the oblivion to which Claudius is fittingly consigned, and, in its gesture back toward Hamlet's story as Shakespeare has told it (so much better than Horatio does), it brings Hamlet's story to a heroic end. "The Undiscovered Country": Hamlet and the Secrets of Death How we respond to the ending of Hamlet—both as revenge drama and as psychological study—depends in part on how we respond to yet a third level of the play—that is, to Hamlet as a prolonged meditation on death. The play is virtually framed by two encounters with the dead: at one end is the Ghost, at the other a pile of freshly excavated skulls. The skulls (all but one) are nameless and silent; the Ghost has an identity (though a "questionable" one) and a voice; yet they are more alike than might at first seem. For this ghost, though invulnerable "as the air," is described as a "dead corse," a "ghost . . . come from the grave," its appearance suggesting a grotesque disinterment of the buried king (1.4.52-57; 1.5.139). The skulls for their part may be silent, but Hamlet plays upon each to draw out its own "excellent voice" ("That skull had a tongue in it and could sing once"; 5.1.77-78), just as he engineered that "miraculous organ" of the Ghost's utterance, the "Mousetrap." There is a difference, however: Hamlet's dressing up the skulls with shreds of narrative ("as if 'twere Cain's jawbone . . . This might be the pate of a politician . . . or of a courtier . . . Why may not that be the skull of a lawyer"; 5.1.78-101) only serves to emphasize their mocking anonymity, until the Gravedigger offers to endow one with a precise historical identity: "This same skull . . . was . . . Yorick's skull, the King's jester" (5.1.186-87). Hamlet is delighted: now memory can begin its work of loving resurrection. But how does the Gravedigger know? The answer is that of course he cannot; and try as Hamlet may to cover this bare bone with the flesh of nostalgic recollection, he cannot escape the wickedly punning reminder of "this same skull" that all skulls indeed look frightfully the same. Ironically, even Yorick's distinctive trademark, his grin, has become indistinguishable from the mocking leer of that grand jester of the Danse Macabre, Death the Antic: "Where be your gibes now? . . . Not one now to mock your own grinning?"; so that even as he holds it, the skull's identity appears to drain away into the anonymous memento mori sent to adorn "my lady's" dressing table. It might as well be Alexander the Great's; or Caesar's; or anyone's. It might as well be what it will one day become—a handful of clay, fit to stop a beer barrel. It is significant that (with the trivial exception of 4.4) the graveyard scene is the only one to take place outside the confines of Claudius's castle-prison. As the "common" place to which all stories lead, the graveyard both invites narrative and silences it. Each blank skull at once poses and confounds the question with which the tragedy itself began, "Who's there?," subsuming all human differences in awful likeness: "As you are now," goes the tombstone verse, "so once was I / As I am now, so shall you be." In the graveyard all stories collapse into one reductive history ("Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth to dust"; 5.1.216-17). In this sense the Gravedigger is the mocking counterpart of the Player; and the houses of oblivion that gravediggers make challenge the players' memorial art by lasting "ill doomsday" (5.1.61). Hamlet shares with the Gravedigger the same easy fellowship he extends to the play's other great outsider, the First Player; but the Gravedigger asserts a more sinister kind of intimacy with his claim to have begun his work "that very day that young Hamlet was born" (5.1.152-53). In this moment he identifies himself as the Prince's mortal double, the Sexton Death from the Danse Macabre who has been preparing him a grave from the moment of birth. If there is a final secret to be revealed, then, about that "undiscovered country" on which Hamlet's imagination broods, it is perhaps only the Gravedigger's spade that can uncover it. For his digging lays bare the one thing we can say for certain lies hidden "within" the mortal show of the flesh—the emblems of Death himself, that Doppelgänger who shadows each of us as the mysterious Lamord (La Mort) shadows Laertes. If there is a better story, one that would confer on the rough matter of life the consolations of form and significance, it is, the play tells us, one that cannot finally be told; for it exists on the other side of language, to be tantalizingly glimpsed only at the point when Hamlet is about to enter the domain of the inexpressible. The great and frustrating achievement of this play, its most ingenious and tormenting trick, the source of its endlessly belabored mystery, is to persuade us that such a story might exist, while demonstrating its irreducible hiddenness. The only story Hamlet is given is that of a hoary old revenge tragedy, which he persuades himself (and us) can never denote him truly; but it is a narrative frame that nothing (not even inaction) will allow him to escape. The story of our lives, the play wryly acknowledges, is always the wrong story; but the rest, after all, is silence. Hamlet is the most popular of Shakespeare's plays for readers and theater audiences, and it is also one of the most puzzling. Many questions about the play continue to fascinate readers and playgoers, making Hamlet not only a revenge tragedy but also very much a mystery. What is this Ghost that appears to Hamlet? Is it Hamlet's murdered father returned from the everlasting fire to demand justice upon his murderer? Is it a "goblin damned"—that is, a demon bent on claiming Hamlet's soul by tempting him to assassinate his king? Or is the Ghost "a spirit of health," an angelic messenger revealing to Hamlet that the young man's mission in life is to cleanse the kingdom of Denmark of its corrupt king? And what happens to Hamlet after the Ghost commands that the throne of Denmark be cleansed? Does Hamlet actually go mad, becoming unhinged by the accusation that his uncle murdered his father or by the ugly picture the Ghost paints of Hamlet's lustful mother? Or does Hamlet merely pretend to be mad, pretend so well that he makes us wonder if we can tell the difference between sanity and madness? Why is he so hostile to women, both to his mother and to the woman whom he once courted and whom he claims to have loved dearly? Why does he wait so long to confirm the guilt of the king after the Ghost has accused the king of murder? And once he is convinced that the king is a murderer, why does Hamlet not act immediately? And what about Gertrude? Was she unfaithful to her husband during his lifetime? Was she complicit in his murder? What does she come to believe about Hamlet's madness? And about her new husband? Beyond such questions about the play and its characters lie deeper issues about the rightness of revenge, about how to achieve an ethical life, and about how to live in a world where tears of sorrow, loving smiles, and friendly words are all suspect because all are "actions that a man might play." Hamlet's world is bleak and cold because almost no one and nothing can be trusted. But his world, and Hamlet himself, continue to draw us to them, speaking to every generation of its own problems and its own yearnings. It is a play that seems particularly pertinent today—just as it has seemed particularly pertinent to any number of generations before us. After you have read the play, we invite you to turn to "Hamlet: A Modern Perspective," by Professor Michael Neill of the University of Auckland.

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