

## THEMES AND MOTIFS IN *HAMLET*

### Corruption spreads from character to character

Claudius' method to gain the throne

Killed brother

Married sister

Eavesdropping/Spying

Claudius and Polonius spy on Hamlet and Ophelia

Polonius spies on Hamlet and Gertrude

Polonius sends Reynaldo to France to spy on Laertes

Claudius calls Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to the castle to spy on Hamlet

Prince Hamlet spies on Claudius while he prays

Prince Hamlet and Horatio spy on Claudius @ play w/in play

Death Plots

Claudius plotted and killed King Hamlet

Claudius plots to have Rosencrantz and Guildenstern escort Hamlet to his death in England

Claudius plots with Laertes to kill Hamlet

Cheating

Claudius cheated Prince Hamlet out of the throne

Laertes cheats during the fencing match

Incest

Lying

Claudius lied about how his brother died

Hamlet lives a lie by pretending to act crazy

Hamlet lies <sup>(?)</sup> when he says he never loved Ophelia

Gertrude lies about loving one of the husbands

Manipulation

King Hamlet uses Prince Hamlet to get revenge on his brother

Claudius attempts to use the King of England to kill Prince Hamlet

Claudius uses Laertes to kill Prince Hamlet

Polonius attempts to use Ophelia to get a spot in the royal family

Claudius attempts to use Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to get rid of Prince Hamlet

Claudius used Gertrude to become king

Prince Hamlet uses the visiting actors and the play within the play to find out the truth about Claudius and the murder

The pirates use Prince Hamlet to get money

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern agree to Claudius' plot against Hamlet to get a reward

Prince Fortinbras uses his men to get land and glory

Polonius uses Reynaldo to spy on Laertes

Claudius manipulates Gertrude to marry him, making him king

Prince Hamlet uses the king of England to kill Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

### Death affects us all

Murder

Prince Hamlet's mission is to murder Claudius

King Hamlet's murder

Plots to murder Hamlet

Death in general

King Hamlet's death

King Fortinbras' death

Polonius' death

Ophelia's death

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's deaths

Gertrude's death

Laertes' death

Hamlet's death

Claudius' death

Hamlet talks to the gravedigger  
Hamlet talks to Horatio in a graveyard  
Hamlet returns to Elsinore because his father died  
Hamlet returns to Elsinore the second time on the day of Ophelia's funeral  
Fortinbras' men are willing to die in battle

#### Suicide

Hamlet meditates on it  
Horatio tries to commit it  
One of the gravediggers is convinced that Ophelia committed it

#### Accidental Deaths

Prince Hamlet accidentally kills Polonius  
Gertrude accidentally kills herself  
Ophelia accidentally kills herself  
Ros & Guild accidentally kill themselves

#### Afterlife

The ghost returns from the afterlife twice  
Hamlet wonders what happens to the human body and the human soul after death  
Hamlet looks at Yorick's skull

#### Poison

The original story was that King Hamlet was killed by the bite of a poisonous snake  
The play w/i the play reenacts the poison in the ear  
Claudius poisons King Hamlet  
Gertrude drinks poison  
Prince Hamlet is killed with Laertes' poisoned sword  
Laertes is killed with his own poisoned sword

#### Disease - Immoral behavior is like a disease

Some related words mentioned in the play:

Tumor – Abnormal growth

Ulcer – An open sore

Fester – an infection that generates pus

#### Doubles - What you see is not always what you get - man has a duplicitous nature

##### Double Meanings

Gravediggers' puns  
Hamlet calls Polonius a fishmonger (fish seller/pimp)  
Hamlet tells Ophelia to go to a nunnery (convent/brothel)

##### Double Dealing

King Claudius pretended to love his brother  
while secretly sleeping with his wife and plotting to take his throne  
King Claudius pretends to care for Prince Hamlet,  
yet tries to have him killed twice  
Gertrude pretended to love King Hamlet,  
yet married his brother less than two months after his death  
Polonius pretends to love Ophelia,  
yet manipulates her relationship with Hamlet for selfish purposes  
Laertes pretends to forgive Hamlet and play fairly at the fencing match,  
but then kills him  
Ros & Guild pretend to be Hamlet's friends,  
but then agree to escort him to his death

##### Double Characters

Characters that seem always to be together  
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern  
Marcellus and Bernardo  
Voltmand and Cornelius  
The Gravediggers

Characters with the same name

King Hamlet and Prince Hamlet (another double: both killed by poison)

King Fortinbras and Prince Fortinbras

Characters that do similar things/are in similar circumstances

Hamlet and Horatio are thinkers

Laertes and Fortinbras are doers

Hamlet and Laertes are students

Hamlet and Laertes both seek revenge for their fathers' deaths

Hamlet and Fortinbras are both princes who are named after their fathers

Hamlet and Fortinbras both have uncles on the throne

Hamlet forces Gertrude to look at the juxtaposed portraits of King Hamlet and King Claudius

Characters that have double relationships

Claudius is Hamlet's stepfather and uncle

Gertrude is Hamlet's mother and aunt

King Hamlet is Hamlet's father and uncle

Gertrude married Hamlet and his brother Claudius

Hamlet and Claudius had the same wife

Gertrude and Claudius are siblings and spouses

### Insanity

Hamlet pretends to be insane

Ophelia goes insane

Hamlet and Laertes go temporarily insane when they leap into Ophelia's grave

### Revenge is a useless goal

King Hamlet wants revenge on Claudius

Prince Hamlet wants revenge on Claudius

Laertes wants revenge on Prince Hamlet

Prince Hamlet gets revenge on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

Prince Fortinbras wants revenge on Denmark

### **Some related words mentioned in the play:**

Justice Duty Honor Murder

### More Notes: