Shakespeare

Third year- Second semester

Hamlet

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Act IV + Act V

We will continue with the theme of artifice and we will see how it is developed in the play. In this act, Queen Gertrude tells Claudius that Hamlet has killed Polonius. Do you remember when she told Hamlet that she will not tell anything to Claudius? The moment Claudius enters she tells him that Hamlet has gone mad. Before that when Hamlet tells her that he is not mad, she told him that she believes him. She is a bad mother. She tells Claudius that Hamlet is mad and he killed Polonius but she did not tell him that he said that Claudius has murdered late king Hamlet; she kept this secret to herself. Maybe she did not believe Hamlet. She believed that Hamlet is mad. It is very hard to accept that Claudius has murdered late King Hamlet, but she does not believe her son and she thinks that her son is mad. She loves Claudius. She is faithful with Claudius, but she is not as faithful with her own son. That is why I believe she is a bad mother and it is my point of view. Claudius tells Gertrude that Hamlet is very dangerous now because he might be himself behind the curtain not Polonius. So, Claudius is scared of Hamlet. He tells Gertrude that he will sent Hamlet to England to be treated and this is very good for Hamlet because if Hamlet stays is Denmark, he will be sued and [Laertes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laertes_(Hamlet)) might come back and seek retribution and revenge for his father. So, she is convinced that the best solution is to send him away from Denmark and to go to England. But the reality that we will know in that same act is that Claudius sends Hamlet to England to be killed there. In act IV, we’ll see the character of Claudius as evil, as a murderer, as sinful, and as unfaithful husband. The king orders Rosencrantz**,** Guildensternto go to look for Hamlet and to ask him about where he hides Polonius’s dead body. The king wants to find Polonius’s dead body to bury it secretly because [Laertes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laertes_(Hamlet)) will come back from France and he’ll see the body and find that it is murdered and his father Polonius did not die normally. So, he wants to get rid of the body of Polonius and to bury it secretly. Hamlet knows that his friends are not true ones. He knows that they are dishonest. He knows that they work for the king; they are the king agents and they do not care about him. So, he pretends to be mad. He talked reasonably with them before because he did not know that they will betray him, but after making sure that they are traitorous, he started to feign madness in front of them. He also feigns madness because he is coward. When we analyze Hamlet’s character, we say that he is coward; he is scared to confess his mistake to the public. He killed Polonius by mistake but still this is a crime. He cannot confront anybody, so he feigns madness to escape punishment.

So, if Hamlet stays in Denmark, he should be given to judicial prosecution and [Laertes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laertes_(Hamlet)) would seek retribution upon Hamlet. Hamlet feigns madness and then he tells his friends to go to the corridor and they will find the dead body of Polonius. So, anyway they went there, they search the place, and they found that Hamlet has hidden Polonius’s body in a cupboard on the stairs. He wants to make them think that he is mad and he killed Polonius in a fit of madness, so he should not be punished. Hamlet then saw the Norwegian troops marching in Denmark. He does not meet [Fortinbras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortinbras) throughout the whole play. He just met one of his generals and he talked to him and that Norwegian Captain told Hamlet that Prince [Fortinbras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortinbras) is convinced by his uncle to invade Poland instead of Denmark. He insists on doing something. When any country has a very strong army, they go and invade another country.

So, Prince [Fortinbras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortinbras) was going to invade Denmark because he knows that he is the rightful king of Denmark, but his uncle convinced him to go to Poland, not to Denmark. **We should compare Hamlet to** [**Fortinbras**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortinbras)**.** **Both of them have the same situation. Both of them, their fathers were killed by their uncles and their uncles usurped the throne from them. Prince** [**Fortinbras**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortinbras) **is very active, decisive, strong, and positive, whereas as Hamlet is coward, weak, negative in his attitude, his thinking, and his hesitating; he does not take action. So, he is contrasted with Prince** [**Fortinbras**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortinbras)**.** Let us say that Prince [Fortinbras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortinbras) might inspire Hamlet to take action; Hamlet might take him as an example and take the right action at the end. And this is actually what will happen; Hamlet will take the right action at the end. Then we know that Ophelia has lost her mind; she has gone mad. So, Ophelia genuine madness is compared with Hamlet’s feigned madness. The theme of artifice is not applied of the madness of Ophelia. In the same act, [Laertes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laertes_(Hamlet)) returns from France. He goes to Claudius.

Now **we should compare Laertes to Hamlet. Both of them lost their fathers. When Hamlet lost his father, he seeks private revenge; he seeks retribution by his own hands. This is not accepted by religion. Hamlet is a scourge; he is an agent of evil. Laertes seeks public vengeance. This is accepted by religion and society. He conforms to society and religion. He becomes a minister; agent of order and goodness.**

Laertes goes to King Claudius with a big group of people. He gets supporters and he goes to King Claudius and he wants to topple or depose King Claudius. So, the people want to topple King Claudius because he is a corrupt king and because Polonius is murdered and Claudius is covering up the crime. King Claudius is smart. He is **Machiavellian character**. This is the 16th century and he is influenced by Niccolò Machiavelli. He laughs at Laertes and he gives him a promise that he will investigate the matter and if he discovered that his father is murdered, he would resign the throne to Laertes. Claudius loves the crown more than he loves God. You remember when he was praying to God and he says in a soliloquy that he cannot resign the crown and the queen. So, he loves the crown more than and more than God. Of course he will not leave the crown to Laertes. He succeeded in calming Laertes down. So, you have to compare Hamlet with Laertes. **Hamlet is sinful, whereas Laertes is virtuous and religious.**

Laertes raises a rebellion against the corrupt King Claudius and he secures public support in his revolt. Hamlet is a popular prince. Hamlet could have done like Laertes. Laertes is not as popular as Hamlet and he could raise a rebellion against the corrupt King Claudius and he secures public support. There are several supporters. He went to the king with his own supporters.

Hamlet travelled to England, so Claudius was happy. He gets rid of Hamlet because Hamlet threatens him. He knows that Hamlet thinks of killing him especially after he has killed Polonius. Hamlet is a threat to Claudius. A sailor comes and he goes to Claudius and announces that Hamlet would return to Denmark. Hamlet sent a letter to Claudius saying that he is coming to Denmark. Claudius feels threatened again. You remember when Hamlet told his mother that he will turn the table over them. So, Claudius got very scared. To kill two birds with one stone, Claudius informs Laertes that Hamlet has murdered his father. Now Claudius is in a critical situation. Hamlet wants to kill him and Laertes wants to take the throne. He is very evil. He is a **Machiavellian character**. Claudius tells Laertes that Hamlet has killed his father, so Laertes decides to kill Hamlet. Claudius tells Laertes that he will help him to escape punishment. Laertes changes to be a scourge because he thinks of private revenge after knowing the murderer. Laertes will make a mistake if he kills Hamlet. Everyone makes a mistake in a tragedy, he fall at the end and usually he dies. So, the audiences do not sympathize with the one who makes mistake and punished. And we call this a **divine justice**. William Shakespeare as a Christian shows that divine justice is realized. Any character who makes a mistake is punished by God at the end. Laertes will make a mistake. He will seek private revenge, so he will be scourge and kill Hamlet and he will die at the end. Claudius laughs at Laertes and he tells him that he will help him. If he kills Hamlet, he will help him to escape punishment. Claudius tells Laertes that he will arrange a fencing match (this is a medieval feature). Laertes tells Claudius that he accepts the fencing match, but he tells Claudius that he will sharpen the point of his rapier and poison it to kill hamlet. This is against law. Laertes has become a scourge and agent of evil. He makes a mistake by his own free will and this is when he falls, the audience will not sympathize with him. Act IV opens with **a comic relief**. In scene one, two gravediggers are preparing the grave for Ophelia. They are holding skulls and putting them aside as if they are playing with toys. The scene shows William Shakespeare’s sense of humor. One of the gravedigger is singing. Then Hamlet comes back from England to Denmark. He is very sad to know that Ophelia had died, so he goes to attend her buried. So, he and Horatio go and talk to the gravediggers. Horatio is his best friend; the only one who is faithful to him in this play and the closest to his heart. So, they talk to the gravediggers and they wonder how humorous they are. Then the burial procession comes and Ophelia is in a coffin. The priest does not give Ophelia a good Christian burial and Laertes complains to the priest. The priest says that she is suspected to have committed suicide and this is enough for her. In religion, if anyone commits suicide, he should not be given a good burial. Laertes sympathizes very much with Ophelia. He agonizes over his sister death. He jumped into the grave and he stood on the coffin and he kept on crying over his sister death and then Hamlet jumps beside him. Laertes is irritated to see Hamlet. He caught him from the throat. He is very angry with him. He knows that Hamlet is the cause of her madness and the cause of her death and he is the murderer of his father. So, he caught him and he wanted to kill him. Then Hamlet told him I loved Ophelia much more than you loved her, she is my beloved. But of course Laertes was mad of Hamlet and the attendance separated them. Then Hamlet leaves with Horatio and Claudius instigates Laertes to kill Hamlet. Claudius tells him Hamlet has arrived and you have seen him and you have to kill him very quickly, the fencing is soon, be ready…. Claudius is very evil.

In scene two, Hamlet tells us what happened to him in his way to England. So, Hamlet tells Horatio that he has discovered a message from King Claudius to the English people to kill Hamlet once they see him. So, he discovered the message. He took it and replaced it by another letter. He wrote in that letter that King Claudius wants to kill [Rosencrantz, Guildenstern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosencrantz_and_Guildenstern). And then he sealed the letter with his father’s signet (the royal signet of late King Hamlet), so the letter became official. Is Hamlet is a scourge or a minister? He is a scourge; he is an agent of evil. He takes private revenge from [Rosencrantz, Guildenstern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosencrantz_and_Guildenstern). They are dishonest friends but do they deserve killing? Hamlet makes another mistake. He goes from one to the other; blood brings blood. He sends [Rosencrantz, Guildenstern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosencrantz_and_Guildenstern) to death. He should not have done this. He has become evil. Will the Elizabethan audience sympathize with him?

After that the pirates attacked the ship and took Hamlet. The rest of the Danes left to England. [Rosencrantz, Guildenstern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosencrantz_and_Guildenstern) left to England and Hamlet was kidnapped by the pirates, maybe because he is a prince and they will ask for ransom to return him. Hamlet could escape from the pirates and he came to Denmark We will see a minor character. The messenger of Claudius is OSRIC. He goes to Hamlet and he tells him that Laertes challenges him to a friendly dueling (fencing). Horatio asks Hamlet to delay the fencing match. He is scared lest Laertes should kill Hamlet because he saw him in Ophelia’s burial, Laertes was mad at him and he caught him from his throat. So, Horatio tells Hamlet to delay the match. Horatio is reasonable and sensible. Hamlet refuses and he tells him that he has been practicing fencing for long time. So, he is very good in fencing. And they know that friendly fencing does not kill. So, Hamlet is not scared and he says no one escapes from his fate. Even if Horatio suspects that Laertes might kill Hamlet, Hamlet says that he believes in fate. The character of Hamlet is reflecting medieval ideas because he represents the middle ages and people in the middle ages used to believe in the power of fate. Before duelling Hamlet goes to talk to Laertes and he tells him that he has brotherly feelings towards him and he apologizes for fighting with him in Ophelia’s burial. Laertes is subtle. He tells Hamlet that he will accept his apology only when experts prove that his name is not dishonored. He is subtle; he does not want to talk directly I will never forgive you, you are the murderer of my father. He means to deceive Hamlet because he has become evil; because he has become a scourge. He becomes a scourge because he becomes dishonorable when he goes and sharpens the point of his rapier and poisons it. He is a criminal. He prepares for a crime. So, he wants to deceive Hamlet. Laertes deceives Hamlet and prepares for killing him and showing him that he is friendly, whereas he prepares for killing him. This has to do with the theme of artifice. In the fencing match, Claudius says that he will drink to the health of the winner and he prepares a poisonous cup for Hamlet. He knows that Hamlet is very good in fencing and that he is well-trained. He knows that he will win in defeat Laertes. He is sure that Hamlet will kill Laertes. And then he will give a cup of wine to Hamlet to drink to his health and in this cup he put for him poison. So, in this case, he will get rid of Hamlet and Laertes; he is killing two birds with one stone. Hamlet wins two hits. Claudius invites Hamlet to drink to his health. Hamlet does not want to drink. So, Queen Gertrude picks the cup and she wants to drink the win. Claudius tries to stop her and he tells her please, do not drink wine. So, she says I just want to drink to your health and she insists upon drinking. He knows that the cup has poison in it and if he breaks the cup, he will be discovered. So, he could not do anything. He leaves Queen Gertrude to die. She drinks from the poisonous cup.

What do you think of Claudius? You have to analyze his character. Is his faithful to his wife? He loves the crown more than his Gertrude although she loves him more than she loves her son. Remember that the ghost told Hamlet, leave to heaven and she will suffer from her choice. She has chosen Claudius and Claudius is the one who will kill her. This is a divine justice. William Shakespeare as Christian shows that divine justice is realized. There is an aside shows that Laertes feels guilty; he suffers from the sense of guilt. Laertes originally is not bad and he is not evil. He says in the aside:

LAERTES: [*Aside*] And yet ’tis almost ‘gainst my conscience.

Sharpening and poising the rapier is something against my conscious. Then he fights with Hamlet and while fighting the rapiers falls, so maybe he stabs Hamlet. And then the rapier falls from Laertes. So, Hamlet picks the rapier and then he stabs Laertes. Both of them are stabbed by the poisonous rapier and this is divine justice because Laertes is wounded by the same poinsonous rapier which he stabbed Hamlet with it. While both of them are bleeding, Queen Gertrude falls down. Laertes feels guilty. As a Christian he says that this is divine justice. He is dying and he knows that this is God’s punishment to him. Laertes feels that he pays for his sin. Hamlet asks Claudius about his mother, so Claudius lies to Hamlet. He tells him that his mother could not bear seeing her son bleeding. Gertrude is not dead yet. She tells Hamlet that there is poison in the drink she has taken. She tells him I am dying because of poison in the cup. She informs Hamlet that someone put the poison in the cup for her and then she passed away. Laertes becomes conscientious. He tells Hamlet that there is no time to seek the traitorous person because within half an hour he will die. He informs Hamlet that he has put poison in the rapier for him. He confesses his guilt. Hamlet does not know that he will die; he thinks that he is only wounded. So, Laertes tells him, you and me have no time; you have half an hour and then you will die. Laertes reveals everything to Hamlet. Laertes becomes an agent of goodness; he becomes a minister before he dies. Laertes is purging his soul before he dies. Laertes at first was a minister and then he became a scourge and then he will die as a minister at the end. He becomes a minister before he dies; he reveals all the truth to Hamlet. He tells him that Claudius is the one who has instigated him to kill him. Laertes tells Hamlet that Claudius is the one who poisoned the queen. Laertes knows that Claudius intended to put poison to Hamlet. When Hamlet knows that Claudius is the one who poisoned his mother, he immediately took action. Hamlet loves his mother very much. He could not bear to see the murderer without killing him. Immediately, he gets up and stabs Claudius with the same poisonous rapier. This is the first time he takes action immediately. And then he forces Claudius to drink from the same poisonous cup he gives his mother. He makes him to drink a sip of the poisonous cup by force. Laertes says again that this is divine justice. In Christianity or in any religion, the good is rewarded and the evil is punished. Before he dies Laertes asks Hamlet to forgive him for killing him. And he says that he will forgive Hamlet for killing his father and causing the death of his sister. They want to forgive each other to reach salvation. So, Laertes forgives Hamlet and then he dies. Hamlet prays to God to help Laertes to reach salvation. Hamlet forgives Laertes also. Horatio the faithful friend for Hamlet wants to drink from the same poisonous cup and dies after Hamlet. He does not want to live without Hamlet. So, Hamlet prevents Horatio from committing suicide and he tells him that he wants Horatio to live and to clear Hamlet’s name. Hamlet does not want people to say that he is a bad friend, murderer, or a scourge. So, he tells Horatio that he wants him to live to tell his story to the people. At this moment Claudius comes and he informs Hamlet that Prince [Fortinbras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortinbras) comes with his expedition from Poland. Hamlet does not see [Fortinbras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortinbras). Hamlet praises [Fortinbras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortinbras). Hamlet believes that he is a figure of order. Hamlet says a prophecy. He foretells (prophesizes) that [Fortinbras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortinbras) will be elected by the Danes. He views [Fortinbras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortinbras) as figure of order not as a tyrant.

Hamlet knows from the ghost that [Fortinbras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortinbras) has the right to the throne. His father’s ghost told him that the king of Norway (Old [Fortinbras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortinbras)) is the rightful king and he himself (Late Hamlet) is suffering in hell because he usurped the throne from him. He is suffering because of his sin. So, Prince [Fortinbras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortinbras) has the right to throne and to be the king of Denmark. So, Hamlet knows that Prince [Fortinbras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortinbras) has this right and he knows that Prince [Fortinbras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortinbras) will realize peace and justice in Denmark.

Hamlet becomes a minister at the end. He is no more a scourge. Hamlet sublimates; he becomes spiritually high. He purges his soul when Laertes kills him. his murder Expiate his previous sins. So, he receives revelation. He starts to see things will happen in the future. He becomes a minister of goodness. He kills King Claudius and this is a public vengeance. His murder of Claudius at the end is an act of public vengeance it is not private revenge anymore. Laertes says in front of the attendance that Claudius is the one who poisoned the queen and Claudius is the one who instigated him to kill Hamlet, so he shows the public that King Claudius is corrupt and deserve to be killed. At this moment, Hamlet rose and killed him. So, his murder of King Claudius is an act of public vengeance.

Hamlet dies before he sees [Fortinbras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortinbras). After his death, [Fortinbras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortinbras) arrives and he sees Hamlet. Horatio tells him the prophecy of Hamlet and tells him what Hamlet said about him. He says the whole story in brief. Horatio says that he will tell Hamlet’s story to the world to know that divine justice is always realized; God punishes the evil and God rewards the good. [Fortinbras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortinbras) sympathizes with Hamlet. He orders his men to give Hamlet an honorable royal burial.

Our play has finished. Let us think of the tragic hero now. Think of Hamlet as a tragic hero.

**Is there catharsis or catharsis is not realized.**

(One of the students gave her point of view and then the doctor comment on her saying).

The doctor:

* Catharsis is realized because Hamlet as a tragic hero is a prince; he is a man of high status in society. The audiences sympathize with him, they experience pity and fear. They pity Hamlet when he falls because he has become a minister and this was at the end only. When he was scourge, the Elizabethans were against him. So, they sympathize with him and at the end they have pity for him. They also are scared lest they should have the same fate. So, catharsis is realized.
* Also there is another point of view which says that Hamlet is not a typical classical tragic hero according to Aristotle. According to Aristotle, the tragic hero must be a superman or a semi-god. But Hamlet is a normal person. And Hamlet has a tragic flaw in his character. What kind of tragic flaw is it? His hesitation; his cowardice.

**What is about the meta-theatrical technique?**

I think that the meta- theatrical technique has reduced the effect of catharsis. Meta-theater makes the audience feel that what they watch is just a play, so they lose their sympathy with the tragic hero. Do the audiences sympathize with the tragic hero when he falls? At the moment he falls, he has become a minister. So, let us sympathize with him. They know he has made mistakes by his own free will. The Elizabethan audiences are influenced by the Desiderius Erasmus. They reject the idea of predestination (fate controls man and man is helpless). They believe that man has a free will to choose between what is right and what is wrong.

There is another point of view concerning this issue. When you think of the play as a whole, you can say that the Elizabethan audiences are divided into two groups. One group adopts the medieval cultural ideas and thinks that fate has directed Hamlet to kill Polonius, [Rosencrantz, Guildenstern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosencrantz_and_Guildenstern) and Laertes and cause the death of Ophelia. So, they consider Hamlet as a victim. They believe that Hamlet’s flaw is hesitation and inability to confront the wrong doers; he cannot go and tell Polonius that he spies on him, he cannot go and tells [Rosencrantz and Guildenstern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosencrantz_and_Guildenstern) that they are traitorous, and he cannot go and tell Claudius that he is the one who killed his father. They sympathize with him at the end, they pity him and they are scared lest they should have the same fate. Catharsis is realized in that case and there is no divine justice. Hamlet is victim and he dies at the end. This is the classical and medieval point of view. They believe that Hamlet is sinned against than sinning. It means that Hamlet is victim of fate.

The other group of the Elizabethans is Christian. They are Christians. They adopt the new humanitarian spirit of the age. They believe that Hamlet has committed his crime his free will. His flaw of character is his belief in private revenge instead of public vengeance. He becomes a scourge or an agent of evil, and then he purges his soul and becomes a minister when he kills Claudius at the very end of the play.

**You can say that catharsis is realized and you can say it is not realized. It is up to you. You can say it is not realized because meta-theater has reduced the effect of catharsis. And you can say catharsis is realized and people sympathize with Hamlet when he has become a minister at the very end of the play.**

**It is up to you but my point of view is that meta-theater violated the cathartic effect. I feel that there is no catharsis.**

Next time, we will discuss the exam questions (mid-term exam and the final exam). We will determine the questions that might come and how to answer them.