Shakespeare

Third year- Second semester

Hamlet

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Last time we discussed act I and I gave you a quotation. We focused on one of the quotations where Hamlet criticizing his mother when she told him why do you seem so melancholic. And then he took the word seem and he kept on making fun on his mother and he has been talking cynically here.

Act I, scene ii

QUEEN GERTRUDE:

Why seems it so particular with thee?

Why are you so melancholic?!

His father died two months ago and it is actually not natural for somebody to keep mourning for so long period of time. God gave people the blessing of forgetfulness to be able to live. All human beings after being very sad, after the shock of death, they become patient and calm down and this is natural. That is why his uncle king Claudius told him that what you are doing is unnatural. This shows that Hamlet is exaggerating his emotions and sadness. He is overacting his sadness. We can say that he is really psychologically sick; he is psycho patient. In the past, there was no science of psychology and the psycho patients were not recognized as sick people who need treatment. They did not know how to treat them. In the 20th century, the science of psychology was born at the hands of **Sigmund Freud. He is an Austrian psychiatrist.** He wrote his theory of psychoanalysis. One of the important things he made is that he wrote his book ‘[*The Interpretation of Dreams*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Interpretation_of_Dreams)*’* and he showed how dreams reflect the unconscious self of the psycho patients. One of the critics said that Hamlet has **Oedipus complex.** That critic has been Freudian in his analysis. Freud said that some psycho patients have complexes like Electra complex and Oedipus complex. Sigmund Freud is known for in his psychological theory that he refers people’s behavior from a sexual point of view. He analyzes people’s behavior from a sexual point of view. So, he said that there are kinds of complexes; Electra complex and Oedipus complex.

Oedipus complex:

It is when the boy loves his mother so much and unconsciously he is interested in her as a woman, not as a mother. So, he loves his mother and he becomes so jealous from her husband, so he hates her husband so much and he wishes he can kill him to get rid of him.

Electra complex:

The girl gets interested in her father so much and loves him so much that unconsciously she gets interested in him sexually as a man, not as a father. Accordingly, she starts to be very jealous of her mother and hates her and becomes very aggressive with her. And she wishes her father divorces her mother; she wants to get rid of her mother.

One of the critics said that there is an oedipal attraction between Hamlet and his mother. This justifies his melancholic state when he heard that she married [Claudius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Claudius) and his wishes to kill [Claudius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Claudius). This critic might think that the ghost has been out of Hamlet’s imagination and he wants to kill Claudius because of his excessive love to his mother.

This is one interpretation. If you check the internet, you will find plenty of analyses for ‘Hamlet’ and Hamlet’s character.

Act I illustrates the theme of order versus disorder while act II illustrates the theme of artifice. So, man pretends to show what he is not to deceive others (appearance versus reality).

ACT II

Act II opens with Polonius; the adviser, the minister, the counselor of King [Claudius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Claudius). Polonius talks to his servant Reynaldo. His name (Reynaldo) is allegorical. William Shakespeare uses the allegorical name Reynaldo which means fox in French to show that that character is cunning. Polonius orders Reynaldo to go to Paris to spy on the Danes in France and his son. He wants to know whether his son is addicted to drugs, drinks wine, goes fencing or even goes to brothel to sleep with ladies. This shows Polonius’s character. He suspects everyone even his own son.

This act is full of various scenes. Something happened that draw the attention of everybody in the court. When I say Hamlet’s melancholia, it means what? This is the influence of medieval features. Hamlet is a character who lives in a middle ages. The setting of the play is the 11th century in Denmark. So, the time is the 11th century and the place is Denmark. So, we expect Hamlet to reflect several medieval features because he was living in the 11th century. (The middles ages started in the 11th century and ended in the 15th century). So, the 11th century is the early middle ages.

So, the play talks about the middle ages and shows the state of Denmark in the middle ages. It was under the control of the late king Fortinbras and then late king Hamlet usurped the throne from him. That was the situation of the play. Hamlet has been imbalanced because he has excess of melancholia in his body. The earthly element of dust overcame the other three elements (fire, air, water). That is why he becomes very sad and prefers to stay by himself. However, when his melancholia increases so much, this affects his senses. He becomes confused and he starts talking and acting like a mad man.

[Ophelia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ophelia) goes to her father Polonius and tells him that Hamlet has scared her when he entered her closet and he looked like a mad man physically and mentally.

In the 16th century, they used to wear tight pants like the lady’s pants and they used to wear stripes on it and they buckle it.

So, his stockings were unguarded, and his knees were knocking each other. He held [Ophelia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ophelia) tightly side, he took deep breath and then he left her. Polonius tells his daughter that Hamlet is lovesick because she started rejecting his letters and messengers and ignoring him. The problem of Hamlet occupied the mind of the king Claudius and the queen[Gertrude](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gertrude_(Hamlet)). They wanted to help Hamlet but of course there were no psychiatrist at that time. So, they brought for him two of his childhood friends; [Rosencrantz, Guildenstern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosencrantz_and_Guildenstern).The king and the queen begged them to go to Hamlet and to talk to him and try to make him speak out all what he has in himself. So, they agreed and they will talk to Hamlet. Polonius got the Danish ambassadors who were in Norway to talk to the king. Their names are Voltimand, and Cornelius. The king of Norway (the one who killed the late King Fortinbras) is a friend of Denmark. Voltimand tells King Claudius that the king of Norway has done something in his favor. He told him that the king of Norway prevented prince Fortinbras from invading Poland. Poland at that time was under the control of King Claudius. So, King Claudius is happy and he says that the king of Norway is like a brother to him. So, it seems that they are cooperated together. I told you before King Claudius said that he will like to make business and trade with the king of Norway. They like each other.

In another scene, Polonius goes to the king and the queen and he tells them that he knows the reason beyond Hamlet’s melancholic state. He tells them that Hamlet is lovesick and he acts this way because he got shock when his daughter Ophelia rejected his love. So, he makes this because of unrequited love; it is like love at one side. Polonius actually wants to please the king and the queen. He tells them that he knows that his daughter does not match prince Hamlet. He knows that she is inferior to Hamlet. Polonius wants to please the king and the queen and comfort them, so he tells them that he prevents Ophelia from submitting to Hamlet and accepting his love. Polonius tells them that he lets his daughter refuse to meet any messenger from Hamlet or receive any letter from him. In order to make them believe him, Polonius tells them that he will give them two proofs because they might not believe and he is a liar, and Ophelia was not an attractive girl; she was ordinary, she was naïve and inexperienced. So, it is hard for them to believe that she has attracted prince Hamlet. So, he showed them one of the love letters which Hamlet wrote to Ophelia and he read it to them, so they were very surprised and they started to be sure that Hamlet really loves Ophelia. The other truth Polonius tells them that they should hide behind a curtain and then he will make Ophelia goes to Hamlet and once Hamlet sees her, he is going to express his love and emotion to her. This will be the second proof to show that Hamlet really adores Ophelia. While talking like this, Hamlet enters. He is holding a book but of course he overheard Polonius talking about plotting for a plan against him. Hamlet felt very bad about Polonius. Hamlet has despised Polonius at that time and this justifies what he will do with him. So, Hamlet pretends to be mad and he goes to Polonius and asks him if he has any daughter and then he tell him that he is a fishmonger; he is making fun of him. He means to insult Polonius. He pretends to be reading from the book but he starts to say things very wisely.

HAMLET: Ay, sir; to be honest, as this world goes, is to be

one man picked out of ten thousand.

In order to find one honest person is like picking one out of ten thousand. As if he is telling to all of them you are dishonest and Polonius is the most dishonest. And he said that old men have a plentiful lack of wit. He means to insult Polonius. And then he tells Polonius,

HAMLET: You cannot, sir, take from me any thing that I

will more willingly part withal: except my life, except my

life, except my life.

We understand that he wants to say ‘if I really want Ophelia, I will take her even against your will but who told you that I want her, I do not want her anymore.’ Maybe his feelings have changed and he does not love Ophelia anymore when he realized that Polonius is using her like a puppet and she has no personality. Maybe he stopped loving her and he realized that he was mistaken to be attracted to her. Maybe he starts to see her as a trivial girl. So, this is the main theme here is the theme of artifice.

Some critics ask ‘is Hamlet really mad, is he feigning madness? Does he pretend to be mad?

Hamlet’s character is rich. William Shakespeare has created a very rich character. That why critics even in the modern age analyzed the character of Hamlet differently.

My point of view is that I believe he is not mad but he is depressed. He may be mentally confused but he is not mad.

Why is he mentally confused? Because of depression, because of so much pressure on him. The ghost has put a huge pressure over his shoulders.

*Another scene:*

[Rosencrantz and Guildenstern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosencrantz_and_Guildenstern) (Hamlet’s childhood friends) go to Hamlet and ask him if he has any problem and they ask him to talk to them. First, he pretends to be mad; he talks to them in a way that shows he is mad. He told them doomsday is near and he asked them why they came to Denmark which is a prison. And then he starts to talk to them logically and he tells them directly ‘Did somebody send you to me?’ Actually they were honest, so they told him yes. The king and the queen sent us for you because they worry about you. When they say the truth, Hamlet is happy because they are honest friends. He does not want to lose them, he does not want to see people deceiving him. So, because they said the truth Hamlet starts to talk to them. Hamlet did not tell them about the ghost, he kept it for himself but he talk to them that he is unhappy in this world and he says a very important quotation:

HAMLET: I will tell you why; so shall my anticipation

prevent your discovery, and your secrecy to the king and

queen moult no feather. I have of late—but wherefore I know

not— lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and

indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly

frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory,

What a piece of work is a man! how

noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving

how express and admirable!

‘Hamlet’ reflects the 16th century England. William Shakespeare always brings a foreign setting and sometimes he chooses a time from the past like in Macbeth.

Hamlet is cynical here; he says that they say that the man is the best one in the world and he is powerful. This is the concept of renaissance humanism (the humanist started to trust man’s capabilities and say that man is not helpless, man is powerful and this is the opposite of the ideas of the classical period when they said that gods control man’s fate.

So, he says in the 16th century, they said man is powerful, What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel!

( in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world!

the paragon of animals!)

Of course this is the opposite of the Great Chain of being.

And yet, to me, what is this quintessence

of dust? man delights not me: no, nor woman neither,

though by your smiling you seem to say so.

According to me, man is created of dust. There is no one to help me out of what I am in; there is no one who helps me to become not melancholic. He knows that he is sick; he knows that he is suffering and he wants somebody to help him.

So, this quotation shows that Hamlet is desperate. He says although man has free will and infinite capabilities no one can save him from that melancholic state. Hamlet talks as a philosopher now, he tells his friends that all people are players; they are forming a play.

Shakespeare here uses a meta-theatrical technique.

Metatheatre is realized by two ways. The writer mentions theatrical affairs like actors, acting, script, and curtain. The other thing is that the writer involves a play within a play. By doing this, he is challenging Aristotle and he is violating the Aristotelian claim of dramatic illusion. (Aristotle has said that the writer should keep dramatic illusion to make the audience believe that what they watch is real life.) This technique will affect the idea of catharsis. Catharsis (spiritual purgation) will not be very strong because of using this technique.

Catharsis =spiritual purgation.

There is something called a metafiction. It is a story within a story; a novel within a novel.

So, Hamlet starts to talk like a philosopher. He tells his friend that all people are players performing a play but there is no one to delight him; there is nothing interesting in watching this play.

[Rosencrantz extends](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosencrantz_and_Guildenstern) the metaphor and agrees with Hamlet that the writers oblige the actors to behave in a way against their wills. Here Hamlet and Rosencrantz revived the medieval idea that the gods control man’s fate. Hamlet concludes that man is fettered in the world and the renaissance idea of free will (renaissance humanism) is just illusion; man has no free will.

Guildenstern joined them in extending the metaphor. You know that Shakespeare’s language is highly metaphorical, for example, you see how he is using the metaphor of the theatre and extending it. At first we have Hamlet, then [Rosencrantz extends](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosencrantz_and_Guildenstern) the metaphor and then Guildenstern comes to join them. He says Guildenstern says that he and Rosencrantz are also players because they come to act the role that the queen and king have ordered them to d it. You notice here the theme of artifice.

Immediately after that scene Polonius comes to tell Hamlet that the best actors in the world arrive to entertain you. When Hamlet sees Polonius, he pretends to be mad to insult him indirectly. So, Hamlet tell him,

HAMLET: O Jephthah, judge of Israel

Because Jephthah has sacrificed his daughter and Polonius is sacrificing his daughter as well; he is sacrificing her happiness by playing with her a dirty game and he makes her lose her lover. He wants to tell him that you have scarified your daughter as Jephthah did. (He made a vow to Jehovah {Allah} that if he wins the war, he would sacrifice the first living thing that comes to him. The first living thing was his daughter, so he killed her. Actually Jephthah sacrifices his daughter unwillingly but Polonius has sacrificed his daughter willingly. Polonius is evil. Jephthah was maybe foolish but not bad.

Then Hamlet welcomes the players very politely and asks them to perform the scene of murder from the Roman poet Virgil ***‘***[***The Aeneid***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virgil#The_Aeneid)***’***. In the classical time, there was the Greek poet Homer. He wrote an epic called ‘***the*** [***Iliad***](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iliad) ***and the odyssey’.*** The hero in ‘The Iliad’ is [Achilles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achilles). After long years, the Roman poet Virgil wrote an epic which is a bit similar to ‘the Iliad’ and he called it ‘[The Aeneid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virgil#The_Aeneid)’ and the hero is in is [Aeneas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aeneas).

So, Hamlet asks the players to perform scene murder from ‘[The Aeneid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virgil#The_Aeneid)’. Hamlet recites lines from ‘The Aeneid’ with a very good accent and good discretion, so Polonius is shocked (how come a mad man memorize this difficult lines of poetry. So, he said please tell me the murder scene and then he starts to say lines from [The Aeneid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virgil#The_Aeneid)’. Polonius starts to suspect that Hamlet is not really mad. Then they start to make the play in front of him (it is a play within a play). In ‘[The Aeneid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virgil#The_Aeneid)’, we do not only have [Aeneas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aeneas) but we have also Pyrrhus; the son of Achilles. He kills the king in front of the queen. So, Hamlet is very much impressed and tears come to his eyes, he wishes he can do it like Pyrrhus in the play to kill the king in front of the queen.

Before the actors leave (after performing the scene), Hamlet aside tells the first player that he will write a scene and he orders him to add it to the play they will perform to him the following night. So, he asks him to perform a play the following night after he puts this invented scene in it. He asks them to perform a play called **‘The Murder of Gonzago'** and Hamlet told the first player that he should study the lines he will write to him and insert them in the play.

Act II end with the long soliloquy.

Hamlet: for it cannot be

But I am pigeon-liver’d

I hardly become angry.

and lack gall

To make oppression bitter, or ere this

I should have fatted all the region kites

With this slave’s offal: bloody, bawdy villain!

Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!

He curses [Claudius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Claudius).

O, vengeance!

Why, what an ass am I!

He is blaming himself.

This is most brave,

That I, the son of a dear father murder’d,

Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,

Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,

He says about himself that he is like a whore. عم قول في كلام و مافي فعل

And fall a-cursing, like a very drab,

A scullion!

Fie upon’t! foh! About, my brain! I have heard

That guilty creatures sitting at a play

Have by the very cunning of the scene

Been struck so to the soul that presently

They have proclaim’d their malefactions;

For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak

With most miraculous organ. I’ll have these players

Play something like the murder of my father

Before mine uncle:

I will let them perform a play about the murder in front of [Claudius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Claudius) to make him remember his crime.

Before mine uncle: I’ll observe his looks;

I’ll tent him to the quick: if he but blench,

I know my course. The spirit that I have seen

May be the devil: and the devil hath power

To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps

Out of my weakness and my melancholy,

He says the ghost may be a devil.

As he is very potent with such spirits,

Abuses me to damn me: I’ll have grounds

I will make sure of that.

More relative than this: the play ‘s the thing

Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king.

I will know if this king commits a crime or not from the impression he gives; from his reaction.

So, Hamlet feels he is coward for not being able to confront the murderer. He believes that [Claudius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Claudius) knows that Hamlet is weak, that is why he is playing with him. Hamlet believes that he (himself) has a weak personality that is why Claudius uses him. Hamlet says in the quotation that he will take action and revenges from Claudius when he makes sure that he has committed the murder. Hamlet tells his plan to the audience. He says that he will order the players to play a murder scene in front of Claudius and then watches his reaction.

I will give you my point of you: (this is my analysis of the scene)

Hamlet’s plan is illogical. He is impressionistic in his attitude. Claudius is evil and cunning. He can easily hide his feelings while watching the play.