Shakespeare

Third year- Second semester

Hamlet

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**Your assignment:**

Keep answering this question until the time we finish the play.

**-trace the theme of artifice in hamlet.**

We are going to study act III and we will find how the theme of artifice is developed by William Shakespeare. When we study act IV, we will find again how William Shakespeare is developing his theme of artifice. So, the theme of artifice is a big theme in Hamlet.

There are many different themes in ‘Hamlet’. Usually, there are main themes and minor themes. The main themes in Hamlet are theme order and disorder, theme of artifice, and theme of revenge.

In act III, we will learn something about the theme of revenge.

**Act III**

In act III, the king and the queen agree to fulfill Hamlet’s wish to attend the play with him. Hamlet sent them to attend the play***‘The Murder of Gonzago'*** and they agree. They believe that Hamlet has become better. They know he is melancholic and maybe he is mad. They do not know what Hamlet prepares to them; they do not know that the play is about murder. They do not know Hamlet’s plan of meeting the players and the party has been created against [Claudius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Claudius). You remember that act II ended with Hamlet saying a soliloquy and telling the audience his plot. He said that he would write a part in the play that makes Claudius felt guilty and makes him know that Hamlet knows that he is the one who killed his father by poison. Who told Hamlet that his father died by poison? The ghost when he mentioned the serpent because this serpent is poisonous and that serpent stung and it took may crown. The ghost informed Hamlet that he poisoned his father. So, the king and the queen are going to attend the play. Before attending the play, Polonius wants to carry on his plan; to make the king and the queen hide and then to make Ophelia stand and Hamlet will come to her and they talk together and the king and the queen become sure that Hamlet is not mad and this is lovesickness because he loves his daughter. Before carrying on this plan, the queen shows Ophelia (she does not tell her but she shows her) that she would be happy if Hamlet really loves her. She shows her that she accepts her to her son. She shows her that there might be royal marriage. She cares about her son and she wants him to be treated. So, if Ophelia is the treatment, it is okay. So, Ophelia is happy because the queen accepts her love to Hamlet. During this time, on one part of the stage, the queen is talking nicely to Ophelia. But King Claudius was beside them. So, in an aside he says something misty.

Let us see the aside on P121.

KING CLAUDIUS: [*Aside*] O, ’tis too true!

Yes, I agree with you, what the nice things you say about Ophelia. And then he says in an aside:

How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!

The harlot’s cheek, beautied with plastering art,

He calls Ophelia an ugly harlot. She wears make-up to look beautiful. This is his point of view of Ophelia.

Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it

Than is my deed to my most painted word:

O heavy burthen

So, here for the first time Claudius shows the audience that he is guilty, dirty or an ugly king. The audience did not know before. Maybe he is a good king and maybe the ghost is just a hallucination. So, nobody knows whether Claudius is good or bad. There was no proof. Now this is the proof that he is a criminal. In this aside, he says that Ophelia’s ugliest is less than his ugly deed. He says that his ugly deed (his crime) is worse that Ophelia’s ugliness.

A student: why Claudius is prejudiced against Ophelia?

Ophelia is not beautiful. However, Hamlet sees her beautiful and he is the only one who sees her very beautiful; she is only beautiful in his eyes. But all people know that Ophelia is ordinary; she is not beautiful and she is not attractive to anybody. She is simple, naïve, and not beautiful. So, here Claudius like all the people (like her father, her brother) knows that she is inferior to Hamlet. They all were sure that Hamlet will not marry her. That is why they convince her not to allow Hamlet to own her.

We know from this that Claudius is a bad character. So, this is the first time we realize that he is hypocrite because he shows something and in reality he is something else. He shows Ophelia that he likes her and in reality he calls her an ugly harlot. Of course she is not harlot but he is very bad man to call her so. After that they left. The queen, the king and Polonius hide behind the curtain and they left Ophelia by herself on the stage because they realized that Hamlet is coming. Hamlet holds a book. This scene is very famous all over the world. So, he comes and he is reading a book and we do not really know whether he is reading or talking with his own mind.

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

This is one of the most memorable lines in William Shakespeare. William Shakespeare is loved by readers, not for his themes. He has been stealing the themes. There were two other plays called Hamlet written by other writers in the 16th century. And then Shakespeare wrote his ‘Hamlet’ and his Hamlet became the most famous because of his highly metaphorical language and because of his memorable lines.

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;

Hamlet is very philosophical here. He does not talk directly although drama in the 16th century is explicit. Hamlet’s speech is subtle and indirect. William Shakespeare was a head of his time. Most of Hamlet’s speeches are subtle and indirect. This is a modern element in his drama. The readers have to read between the lines to understand what Hamlet says. Because the 16th century audiences were supposed not to be cultured, I believe that they did not understand what Hamlet means. And they think that Hamlet is mad and talking madness. Modern readers are capable of interpreting Hamlet’s speeches. Some critics that Hamlet talks about the corrupt society he is living in. They say that (to be or not to be) means to bear such hardships in a corrupt society or to commit suicide. He says to himself shall I accept living in such a corrupt society or I commit suicide?

He is a Christian and he knows that Suicide is illicit.

Other modern critics say that (to be or not to be) means to kill Claudius or not to kill Claudius. Hamlet hesitates. Since the ghost told him that his father has been murdered by Claudius, he did not take action. He believes the ghost. He thinks as person in the middle Ages and he has deductive way of thinking. So, he believes the information given to him by the ghost. He believes that his father is poisoned by Claudius and he is sure of that but he keeps on justifying his inaction. Hamlet throughout the whole play is justifying his inaction. He hesitates and this is obvious in this quotation. What is the important in this quotation? It shows Hamlet’s hesitation. He is unable to take action. He is puzzled to take action or not to take action.

I believe (my point of view) that Hamlet means by (to be or not to be) to kill Claudius or not to kill him, this is his question.

Hamlet admits in this quotation that he is coward, he is feared. He knows that he is feared. Fear is one of the traits of a slave. Hamlet encourages himself and he says that he does not accept to live as a slave. He wants to take action but there is something that keeps him from taking action; there is something inside him. It might be a complex. Let us say that Hamlet is torn between his duty to kill Claudius and his fear of being punished by law. Hamlet wants to achieve or accomplish retributive justice. We should think of Hamlet into two ways. Hamlet has an inner conflict. He is a person living in the middle ages; he is traditional in thinking. He has a deductive way of thinking. He believes that fate controls man. Think of Hamlet also as a Christian man. The Christians believe in the Old Testament and New Testament. The Old Testament is الديانة اليهودية. Jesus was sent by God to complete Judaism because the Judaism was incomplete. It was very strict; it does not have tolerance (there was intolerance in it). So, God sent Jesus to teach people how to become tolerant. And Islam has both of them (tolerance and intolerance). In the Old Testament, God said ‘an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’. It means that Hamlet as a Christian wants to achieve retributive justice. He believes that an eye for any and a tooth for a tooth. Claudius has killed his father, so he wants to kill him. How should he achieve the retributive justice? By his own hand or through law? If everybody achieved retributive justice by his hand, the community is going to be a forest. So, you have to go to law. What about law in Denmark? It is corrupted because there is a corrupt king, corrupt law, corrupt society, and corrupt, so how can Hamlet achieve his goal, how can Hamlet help his father to rest his soul?!! To remove the corruption? Is it a solution? In the following act, we will see this suggestion.

Hamlet is not mad. He is mentally disturbed. He is a psycho patient. He suffers from complexes.

After this long quotation, Hamlet started to talk to Ophelia. Of course Ophelia does not understand anything from Hamlet because she is simple-minded. She is not cultured, naïve, and innocent. So, Hamlet is highly philosophical but he is not intellectual. He is highly philosophical. Ophelia is not like him at all, so she does not understand anything but she wants to carry on the plan. So, she goes and talks to him about their love. She was rejecting him and now she goes to discuss about their love because she wants the king and the queen and Polonius to hear him confessing his love to her. So, when she starts talking about their love, Hamlet embarrassed her and he tells her that she deceives herself. He told her I do not love you. Who told you I love you? Hamlet knows that there are Eavesdroppers behind the curtain. Hamlet after shocking her by denying her love, he starts to act like a mad man. He feigns madness. Here the theme of artifice is developed here. He pretends to be mad. He is not mad, but he acts as if he is a mad man. He asked her whether she is honest or beautiful. And then he tells her you should go to live in a nunnery. He means that he does not want her to marry any man. He tells her you should not marry any man because all men are wicked and revengeful. He wants to tell her that although he loves her, he is taking revenge from her. He really loves her but he is taking revenge from her because she listened to her father and she turned against him. Then to offend her, he tells her if she marries any man, she will make of him a monster. He means cuckold because the cuckold has horn. He means that Ophelia loses her lovers. She distances with those who love her. If she has a good husband, she will not be faithful to him. And this is what happened to him. Hamlet is talking indirectly and of curse Ophelia does not understand. Then Hamlet asked her about her father. He tells her where is your father now? She says he is at home. So, he tells her okay, keep him at home because if he goes out, he will spread his foolishness everywhere. He means to insult Polonius because he knows that he is behind the curtain. And here Ophelia is a liar because she lies to him and she tells him that her father is at home. She deceives Hamlet for the sake of her father. She is like a puppet in the hands of her father and that is why Hamlet now is playing with her. He really loves her but he shows her the opposite. Let us think of Ophelia as a victim. Ophelia is a victim of men; Polonius, [Laertes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laertes_(Hamlet)), and Hamlet. Hamlet left Ophelia and then the king and Polonius came out. Claudius is sure that Polonius does not understand anything now and Hamlet does not love Ophelia at all. So, Polonius is in a critical situation because he was assuring them that it was lovesickness and Hamlet loves his daughter. Now Claudius is sure that Hamlet is not lovesick and he believes that this is melancholia. So, he decides to send him to England to be treated and he will ask his friends ([Rosencrantz, Guildenstern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosencrantz_and_Guildenstern)) to travel with Hamlet to England to take care of him.

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Hamlet talks to the players. They will perform a play called ***‘The Murder of Gonzago'.*** Before the play, Hamlet talks to the players and he guide them like a director. He tells them:

HAMLET: Be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion

be your tutor: suit the action to the word, the word

to the action;

He tells them do not overact; do not exaggerate in expressing yourselves.

for any thing so overdone is from the purpose of

playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to

hold, as ‘twere, the mirror up to nature;

So, anyway he is teaching them how to act. He asks them not to overact. Shakespeare refers to theatrical affair. So, he is using the meta-theatrical technique. And this technique cording to Aristotle violates the dramatic illusion that what they watch is real life. Aristotle says that the dramatic illusion should be kept. The audience should believe that they watch is real life and they will be purged spiritually (purgation/catharsis). This technique will affect the idea of catharsis. Catharsis (spiritual purgation) will not be very strong because of using this technique.

The meta-theatrical technique used by Shakespeare is a modern technique. It is anti-Aristotelian technique.

Before starting the play, Horatio arrives and Hamlet became very good and he kept on praising Horatio as a faithful friend to him and he tells him to watch with him the facial expression of Claudius. And after the play, they sit together and discuss and come up with the conclusion whether Claudius is criminal or not. Hamlet knows that Hamlet is criminal. He is delaying killing Claudius because he hesitates, because he is coward. Why does he make the play and ask Horatio to watch to Claudius and then he decides? He is wasting the time. He is incapable of taking action or he does not want to take action or he is coward; he is afraid of killing. And do not forget that Hamlet is Christian also. He believes in retributive justice but he knows that it should not be done by his own hand. He is in a conflict.

Everyone sits to watch the play. Hamlet chooses to sit beside Ophelia because he really loves her. He is really interested in her. And he says that from this position he can watch Claudius better. But he sits beside her because he really loves her. It is really that he is taking revenge from her, but he loves her. He sits beside her and he keeps telling Ophelia things of sexual implication, for example, he tells her that he wants to lie in her lap. Then the play (‘The Murder of Gonzago')starts. The play is a play within the play call ‘Hamlet’. And a play within a play is one of meta-theatrical technique. ‘The Murder of Gonzago' play is totally classical because it starts with an argument. In this argument, an actor comes up and summarizes the whole play to the audience. It is explicit drama. The audience is not cultured. Another way of saying the argument is the dump-show تمثيل صامت.

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[*Enter a King and a Queen very lovingly;*

The king and the queen love each other very much. Hamlet wants to say that the queen is Gertrude and the king is the old Hamlet.

[*Trumpets sound. The dumb show enters.*]

[*Enter a King and a Queen very lovingly; the Queen embracing*

*him, and he her. She kneels, and makes show of protestation*

*unto him. He takes her up, and declines his head upon her*

*neck: lays him down upon a bank of flowers: she, seeing him*

*asleep, leaves him. Anon comes in a fellow, takes off his crown,*

*kisses it, and pours poison in the King’s ears, and exit. The*

*Queen returns; finds the King dead, and makes passionate action.*

*The Poisoner, with some two or three Mutes, comes in*

*again, seeming to lament with her. The dead body is carried*

*away. The Poisoner wooes the Queen with gifts: she seems loath*

*and unwilling awhile, but in the end accepts his love*.]

The queen is supposed to be Gertrude. She accepts Claudius immediately after he gives her gifts and he talks nicely to her.

From this dumb show, does she know that Claudius has poisoned her husband? No. Hamlet knows that Gertrude does not know that Claudius is the criminal and he knows that his mother is innocent, but he despises his mother for marrying Claudius and this is incestuous marriage. As a Christian he does not accept it. Then there is a prologue after the argument. And the prologue was very brief. So, Ophelia says that the prologue is very brief and Hamlet tells her as brief as woman’s love. What does he want to tell her? He wants to tell her that women, like her and like his mother, are not faithful enough to keep the love of one man because Ophelia has sold him for the sake of her father. Gertrude has sold old Hamlet and she married Claudius. Hamlet feels wounded because his mother has been hasty in taking the decision on marrying Claudius very fast. After the argument, Claudius controlled his feelings. He is a practiced hypocrite. He does not show any sense of guilt. He was calmed. After the prologue, the play started. The play as I told you is very classical. It is full of classical allusions to the gods and the goddesses. The players mention Apollo (God of the sun), they mention Neptune (God of the sea), Tellus (Goddess of the earth), and Hymen (God of marriage). Remember that act II ended with long soliloquy and in this soliloquy, Hamlet says that he will put one part in the play that shows Claudius his guilt. Hamlet surprises the audience because the part he put in the play does not concern Claudius but it concerns his mother. He said he would do something and then when started writing he wrote something else. The part Hamlet added to the play ‘The Murder of Gonzago' is about the queen’s misconduct, not about the king’s guilt. This shows that Hamlet is not wounded by his father’s murder as much as he is tormented with his mother’s marriage to Claudius. Hamlet has Oedipus complex. According to **Sigmund Freud**, he is unconsciously attached to Gertrude as a man, not as a son. According to Freud, he wished to kill his own father and marry his mother like Oedipus. If Hamlet has been loving his father so much, he would have harried and kill Claudius immediately when he knows from the ghost that Claudius is the murderer. This is the reason of his hesitation and of his inaction. He is not concerned about his father. Where is the proof of that? When he said to himself that he is going to write a part in the play about Claudius’ guilt, he found himself writing about his mother’s misconduct. And there are other proofs that the issue of the mother is the thing that wounds Hamlet. The play is performed. Claudius broke down when he saw the player putting the poison in the king’s ear. He felt that Hamlet knows that he has poisoned his brother. So, goes worried and he talked to Polonius. He told Polonius ‘is that scene offensive?’ Hamlet does not give a chance to Polonius to talk and he replies. He told the king that this is not a real play; this is imagination. Of course Claudius is sure that Hamlet has discovered what he has done; he is sure that Hamlet knows that he is a criminal. And he will be scared of Hamlet. Then, Ophelia tells Hamlet that he is like a chorus. She is telling him that he is playing the chorus. Chorus is always found in the classical drama. A chorus is one actor or more, he or they always comment on action to help the audience to understand more. Now he is playing the chorus and he tells them listen everybody, now we will watch the part when the king, who stole the crown, is going to woo the queen and the queen will relent to him. Claudius could not bear it and he said enough of this, turn on the lights, I want lights and then he left and he was angry. When they left, Hamlet talks to Horatio and Horatio assures him that Claudius has been disturbed because of the play and he assures him that he is the criminal; Horatio assures Hamlet that Claudius has killed his father because it was shown on his face. Claudius acts as a guilty man. Then, we go to the theme of artifice again. Hamlet though that [Rosencrantz and Guildenstern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosencrantz_and_Guildenstern) are good friends. And then when he found them carrying the orders of the king and the queen against him, he started to disgust them. They are playing the role of friends but they are not friends. So, we find [Rosencrantz and Guildenstern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosencrantz_and_Guildenstern) informing Hamlet that the king has been disturbed while watching the play and his mother wants to meet him in her closet. Hamlet before meeting his mother, he soliloquizes. He cannot control his anger when he sees his mother. In this soliloquy, he says he has the soul of the Emperor Nero. He is a Romanian emperor in the classical time who slaughtered his mother and burned Rome. So, he says I will go to meet my mother now while I have the soul of Nero. So, he tries to calm himself down. He despises his mother but he does not want to kill her. In this scene, Queen Gertrude is in her closet and Polonius is talking to her. Polonius tells her that he will hide behind the curtain to listen to her conversation and after Hamlet leaves he wants to go to tell the king. Queen Gertrude is not a good mother because she accepts Polonius to hide behinds the curtain and deceive her son. She is a bad mother. So, he hid behind the curtain and then Hamlet enters. He has the soul of Nero, he is irritated, and very envious. Before this scene there is another scene I forget to tell you about. Claudius says an important soliloquy. In this soliloquy, he confesses his crime and he prays to God to forgive him. He knows he will be damned by God. He is sure that God will not forgive him because he says cannot give up the crown or the queen. He has a chance to be saved but he says I cannot give up the crown or the queen. He knows he will go to hell. And he prays to God.

Hamlet enters while he is praying. He refuses to kill him while praying because he says if I kill him while praying, he will go to heaven. Maybe he is hesitating again. So, he says if I kill him now, he will go to heaven and I want him to go to hell. So, I will wait until I kill him if he is drunk asleep or when he is in bed with my mother (because this is an incestuous marriage and he is committing a sin). Hamlet is giving a pretext. This is a pretext for his inaction.

Then we will go to the meeting between Hamlet and his mother.

He goes to her with the spirit of Nero in him. He talks very badly to her. She blames him for offending Claudius. When she defends her husband, she irritates Hamlet more. And he starts to confront her that she had committed a sin which is incest to accept to marry her husband’s brother. And he told her that he is not mad and he is talking truth to her. He told her also that Claudius has killed his father. This is the first time to hear about that. Gertrude does not know. She does not believe Hamlet and thinks that Hamlet is mad. She believes her son has gone mad. Hamlet at this moment wished to be like Pyrrhus; the son of Achilles, who kills Claudius in front of the queen. Hamlet was talking violently with the queen accusing her with the sins she is committing and coming very close to her, holding her, and seizing her. So, she screamed and she asked him if he want to kill her and she cried for help. Polonius behind the curtain got scared and he echoed what she was saying {What, ho! help, help, help!} and he moved, so the curtain moved. So, Hamlet immediately got his sword out and killed Polonius. At this moment, he is like Pyrrhus who killed the king in front of the queen. Polonius shocked him by coming out of the curtain and saying {O, I am slain!}. So, Hamlet got shocked; he thought it is Claudius. Hamlet felt very sad. He did not want to kill Polonius. Polonius is an innocent man. He is foolish and Hamlet is despises him but he does not deserve to be killed for his foolishness and for his evil. This is not a punishment for evil to be killed. The ghost appeared to Hamlet. Gertrude does not see him but Hamlet sees him and talks to him. The ghost came to tell Hamlet two messages. He came to ask him why he is very late in killing Claudius. He blames Hamlet for his delay in killing Claudius. The second thing is that he asked Hamlet to relent with his mother; to pity his mother. Remember that he told him leave her to heaven. He does not want Hamlet to be very harsh with his mother. These are the two messages. So, Gertrude saw Hamlet talking to the air. So, she is sure that Hamlet is mad.

Why does the ghost appear to everybody and does not appear to Gertrude?

One critic said the Gertrude is not a good person. She has an evil spirit in her. She is sinister. The ghost is a good spirit; it appears to good people only. It appears to Horatio, Hamlet, and to Marcellus, but not to Gertrude. Hamlet assures his mother that he is not mad and asks her to believe him. He wants to help his mother. The ghost has just told him to relent with her, so he told his mother I want you to go to heaven; I want you to be saved. To help his mother to be saved, Hamlet tells his mother to repent her deeds and confess her sins. And he tells her that the first step to salvation is not to sleep with Claudius again because this is incest. Hamlet tells his mother that he does not mean to kill Polonius at all and he tells her that he feels that fate has put Polonius in his way. He believes he is innocent and he is not responsible for that. He believes that fate urges him to be cruel only to be kind. Hamlet is highly philosophical. Fates urges him only to be kind. The fates involve Hamlet in crimes to encourage him to take action and achieve retributive justice. Hamlet says that he has become a scourge (a sinful revenger) and minister (virtuous revenger). He achieves retributive justice. There is a question, is he a scourge or the minister? He is torn between an inner conflict. He is confused. It is up to you after finishing the play to say this is the climax of the events or not. It is a very important incident in the play. Polonius’s death raises different philosophical questions. Is Hamlet is a scourge or a minister? Is Hamlet good or fine? Is Hamlet sinful or innocent? Hamlet tells his mother also that Claudius will send him to England with his two friends who are untrue friends [Rosencrantz, Guildenstern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosencrantz_and_Guildenstern). He tells his mother that he knows that Claudius wants to trap him. (I forget to tell you that when Claudius asked Hamlet when he was watching the play ‘*The Murder of Gonzago*’, ‘what is the title of the play?’ Hamlet replies The mouse trap. He means I made this play to trap you in, you are a mouse. I will trap you and I already trapped you. When you showed your anger, you get trapped in.)

So, here he says that he knows that Claudius wants to trap him by sending him to England. He knows that [Rosencrantz, Guildenstern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosencrantz_and_Guildenstern) will take part in his destruction. He knows that Claudius will prepare for his death in England. So, he tells his mother that he will turn the table on him. Claudius wants Hamlet to be in England, so Hamlet will kill Claudius. He tells her indirectly that he will kill Claudius. He does not mention it. His language is subtle language. We have to read between the lines to understand what Hamlet means. This is the end of the act, you have to think of the issue of free will and fate; what about Hamlet? What about our tragic hero? What controls him, his fate or his free will? Does he kill Polonius by fate or by free will? Because Hamlet lives in the Middle Ages, he tells his mother that he believes that fate makes him kill Claudius, he is innocent; he is not sinful. This is Hamlet’s point of view who lives in the middle Ages, but the renaissance audience will think that Hamlet has a free will. Hamlet chooses to kill Polonius. He does not mean, but this is his mistake. So, he is to be blamed and sinful because Hamlet was very hasty. He does not show his face when he kills him and this is foolishness. So, if Hamlet is foolish to do this, if he was hasty to do this, so he is to be blame. From Elizabethan point of view, he has free will and he makes mistake, so he is to be blame. In Polonius issue, there are many points of view. The point of view of Hamlet is contrasted with the Elizabethan point of view. Hamlet believes that he did it because of fate and he is an innocent, whereas the Elizabethans believe that it is free will and if he is foolish and hasty, he is still to be blamed.