



Update Page for Class of 9/25/24

Course materials and info page: <https://sacks-richard.com/hamlet-at-du-materials>

For our final class on *Hamlet* (that of 9/25), we will move on to the final two acts as we try to figure out what this astonishing play is ultimately arguing. So please come to class armed with your interpretations – and the evidence to back them up – as we bring down the curtain on our efforts to somehow, against all odds, get our heads around this awe-inspiring piece of art. **We'll also factor into our analyses the production of *Hamlet* we'll be seeing at DCPA this Saturday evening.** So please come prepared to share your thoughts on what worked and didn't work in that production. And here again, for one last time, are some specific passages and questions (including variations of those we didn't get to last time) which you might find helpful and/or provocative to consider as you try to work toward your conclusions:

- 1) What do you make of 4.4, the scene in which Hamlet sees Fortinbras' army passing through Denmark on its way to Poland,** a scene which ends with Hamlet's soliloquy of 4.4.32-66, including the notoriously ambiguous sentence: "Rightly to be great / Is not to stir without great argument, / But greatly to find quarrel in a straw / When honour's at the stake" (4.4.53-56)? Note that this scene is almost entirely absent from F (only its first 8 lines are included there), so you might find it an interesting exercise to consider how, if at all, our experience of the play changes if only the first 8 lines of 4.4 are included.
- 2) What do you make of Ophelia's role in the final acts of the play,** beginning with what we hear about and witness in her in 4.5, as well as what we hear in Gertrude's report at 4.7.163ff. concerning the details of Ophelia's death? Since the question of whether or not she committed suicide comes up in connection with her "maimèd [funeral] rites" (5.1.186) – note the exchange between the two grave-diggers/clowns at 5.1.1-24 as well as that between Laertes and the Priest at 5.1.190-209a – you might want to think about how the answer to this question affects our interpretation of the play.
- 3) What do you make of Laertes' role in the final acts of the play,** from the time he reappears crying out "Where is this king" (4.5.112), up through his final dying words at 5.2.306b-310? Note that well before Laertes comes on stage in 5.2, Hamlet says – amidst lines absent from the generally more "complete" Q2 – "But I am very sorry, good Horatio, / That to Laertes I forgot myself, / For by the image of my cause, I see / The portraiture of his (5.2.75-78).
- 4) What do you make of Hamlet at the end of 5.1 after he sees Laertes leap into Ophelia's grave at 5.1.217,** including Hamlet's claim that "I loved Ophelia; / forty thousand brothers / Could not with all their quantity of love / Make up my sum" (5.1.236-8)?
- 5) What do you make of Hamlet's narration to Horatio at the beginning of 5.2 concerning the fate of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, including Hamlet's statement "They are not near my conscience" (5.2.58)?** Note that Hamlet interrupts his own narration, almost before he's begun it, with "Rashly, / And praised be rashness for it – let us know, / Our indiscretion sometime serves us well / When our deep plots do pall, and that should learn us / There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will –" (5.2.6-11a).
- 6) What do you make of Hamlet's final non-public speech at 5.2.192-196** (it's not a soliloquy, strictly speaking, since he's having a private conversation with Horatio just before the full court enters as this speech ends)? Note that there are at least two potentially significant differences in this speech between Q2 and F in terms of what follows "the readiness is all" – Q2 reads "since no man of ought he leaues, knowes what is't to leaue betimes, let be." while F reads "since no man ha's ought of what he leaues. What is't to leaue betimes?"

- 7) **What do you make of Fortinbras' role in the closing scene?** We hear "*March afar off, and shot within*" in the middle of 5.2.328, and when the dying Hamlet then asks "What warlike noise is this" (328b), Osric replies "Young Fortinbras, with conquest come from Poland, / to the ambassadors of England gives / This warlike volley" (329-331a). Then Hamlet, in what turns out to be his final speech, says "But I do prophesy th'election lights / On Fortinbras; he has my dying voice" (334-335). Fortinbras then enters after line 340 and speaks four times as the play ends, including "For me, with sorrow I embrace my fortune. / I have some rights of memory in this kingdom, / which now to claim my vantage doth invite me" (367-369) and "For he [= Hamlet] was likely, had he been put on, / To have proved most royal" (376-377).
- 8) **Finally, here's one last variant reading to consider: the end of 5.2.362** which reads "**forced cause**" in F (and is the reading adopted in our edition), but "**for no cause**" in Q2.