



Update Page for Class of 9/11/24

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

For our second class (that of 9/11), we will focus our attention on what we make of the state and/or evolution of Hamlet as the first half of the play progresses, picking up at 1.4-5 as Hamlet joins Horatio and Marcellus for the watch on the ramparts, and then sees and speaks with the Ghost. As per the reading schedule on the syllabus, please read through 3.1 which features both the "to be or not to be" speech and also the first on-stage interchange between Hamlet and Ophelia. As will be the case each week, here are some specific passages and questions which you might find helpful and/or provocative to consider as you continue to wrestle with this extraordinary work of art:

- 1) What do you make of Hamlet in 1.4-5?** Some aspects you might find productive to explore include: **A)** his "vicious mole of nature speech" (1.4.17-38 and not in F); **B)** Horatio's concern that if Hamlet goes off alone with the Ghost, it "might deprive your sovereignty of reason / And draw you into madness" (1.4.73-74); **C)** Horatio's observation as Hamlet exits with the Ghost that "[Hamlet] waxes desperate with imagination" (1.4.87); **D)** the first half of 1.5 in which Hamlet is alone on stage with the ghost (1.5.1-91); and **E)** Hamlet's behavior in the second half of 1.5, including his comment "How strange or odd some'er I bear myself, / As I perchance hereafter shall think meet / To put an antic disposition on..." (1.5.170-172).
- 2) What do you make of Ophelia's report to her father in 2.1 about Hamlet's behavior** (2.1.75-98) which she says has so "affrighted" her (73)?
- 3) What do you make of Claudius' decision-making in the opening section of 2.2**, which features his plan to use Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to figure out what's going on with Hamlet (2.2-1-58a), Voltmand's report on the embassy to Norway (2.2.58b-84a), and Polonius' explanation of why "Your noble son is mad" (2.2.86-165)?
- 4) What do you make of Hamlet in the middle section of 2.2**, from the moment he enters at line 166 up until the players enter at 385, a sequence which features his interactions first with Polonius (2.2.169-212) and then with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (2.2.215-348), the latter of which includes two Folio-only passages (2.2.229-256 and 313-333), the famous "what a piece of work is a man speech" (2.2.278-292 but in prose, not verse), and a line often considered one of the most puzzling in the play, "I am but mad north-north-west. When the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw" 2.2.347-348)?
- 5) What do you make of the speech at 2.2.408-476 which "begins with Pyrrhus" and which Hamlet asks the First Player to deliver?** Some aspects you might find productive to explore include: **A)** Hamlet's "intro" to the speech (2.2.395-407); **B)** Hamlet's "false start" (2.2.408-410) as he begins the speech himself; **C)** the fact that Hamlet delivers the first part of the speech (2.2.408-422) and then tells the Player to take over; **D)** the insertion of Polonius' two interruptions (at lines 424 and 456), and then Hamlet's (at line 461); and **E)** the final part of the speech focusing on Hecuba ("Say on, come to Hecuba," Hamlet instructs the Player at line 458-9) until the speech finally ends at line 476.
- 6) What do you make of Hamlet's soliloquy which ends 2.2** and which begins with Hamlet's passionate self-flagellation (2.2.502-540) before concluding with his plan to present a play before the king and the reason he feels that doing so is necessary (2.2.541-558)?
- 7) What do you make of Hamlet in 3.1** (he enters at line 56)? Does he notice that Ophelia is there when he enters at line 56, or not until the middle of line 88 ("Soft you now, The fair Ophelia..."), or somewhere in between? Also, does he know at any point while he is onstage in 3.1 that he is being observed by the King and Polonius? And do your answers to these questions affect your interpretation of the "to be or not to be" speech (3.1.56-88) and/or his ensuing interaction with Ophelia in this scene (3.1.88-143)?