



**Update Page for Class of 9/18/24**

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

**For our third class (that of 9/18)**, we will pick up where we left off toward the end of act 2 at the moment we "come to Hecuba" (2.2.458ff.). We will then move on to act 3, with its many "observed [and] observers" (3.1.148), as we continue to try to understand the evolution of Hamlet. As per the reading schedule on the syllabus, please read through 4.7 (the final scene in act 4), or – if possible – through the end of the play. And here again are some specific passages and questions (including those we didn't get to last time) which you might find helpful and/or provocative to consider as you continue your text-wrestling:

- 1) As act 2 draws to a close, what do you make of A) the final part of the Pyrrhus speech focusing on Hecuba (2.2.460-476 – "Say on, come to Hecuba," Hamlet instructs the Player at 2.2.458-9), as well as B) Hamlet's reaction to the Player's performance in the soliloquy with which act 2 ends, a speech 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)?**
- 2) What do you make of Hamlet in 3.1** (he enters at line 56 right after Claudius' aside in lines 49-54)? You might want to consider **A)** whether Hamlet notices 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; **B)** whether he knows at any point in 3.1 that he is being observed by the King and Polonius; and **C)** whether your answers to these two questions affect your interpretation of the "to be or not to be" speech (3.1.56-88a) and/or his ensuing interaction with Ophelia (3.1.88b-143).
- 3) What do you make of the various parts of 3.2, the play-within-the-play scene, including A)** Hamlet's instructions to the First Player (3.2.1-36); **B)** Hamlet's interchange with Horatio (3.2.43-81); **C)** the description of the dumb-show (the stage direction between lines 120 and 121– you might find Hirschfeld's note on this stage direction helpful); and finally **D)** the staged play itself from the moment the Prologue begins to speak at line 130 until Ophelia announces "The king rises" at line 240?
- 4) What do you make of Hamlet's decision not to kill Claudius in 3.3** (Hamlet enters after 3.3.72 and sees Claudius kneeling, though only Q1, the so-called "bad" quarto, has a stage direction indicating that "He kneels"?)
- 5) What do you make of 3.4, the scene in Gertrude's chambers?** Some moments you might want to consider include **A)** Hamlet's killing of Polonius over whose body he says "I took thee for thy better" (3.4.32); **B)** Hamlet's speech to his mother at 3.4.53-88a (the longest uninterrupted speech in the scene), immediately after which she cries "O Hamlet, speak no more, / Thou turn'st my eyes into my very soul" (88b-89); **C)** the interlude with the Ghost (who enters at line 102 and departs at 137), including the scene's insistence that Gertrude does not see it (you might ask yourself how you would stage that); **D)** Hamlet's statement to his mother in lines 188-189 that "I essentially am not in madness, / But mad in craft," as he asks her not to reveal that to Claudius; and **E)** the Q2-only lines (3.4.203-211) in which Hamlet turns his attention to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
- 6) 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?** 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 all but the first 8 lines of 4.4 are omitted.
- 7) What do you make of the roles of Ophelia and Laertes in the second half of act 4?** They both appear in 4.5, and then Laertes is back onstage through all of 4.7, near the end of which (after line 161) Gertrude enters to report the news (including some details) of Ophelia's death.