*Hamlet* Act I

I. i

* Function of Scene I
  + Focuses on Hamlet Sr. and the conflict between Fortinbras of Norway and Denmark
  + Explains why Denmark is preparing for war (social unrest)
  + Convinces us of reality of ghost (seen by 3 people)
  + “death” occurs to begin and end this tragedy (play is framed by death)
  + Allows reader to foresee Claudius as a bad guy
  + Horatio is the voice of reason
  + Ghosts in Elizabethan times were seen as very real; Elizabethans believed ghosts could appear to whomever they wanted
  + Suspicions of this ghost arise in Scene 1. It could be an evil spirit (it disappears when the rooster crows – signaling dawn)

Exposition

* Setting
  + at a royal court, Elsinore (castle)
  + On rocky sea-washed Danish coast
  + Outside castle during night watch
  + midnight
  + Tension
  + Country preparing for war
  + People nervous/Guards of edge (apparition sightings)
  + Mood – foreboding & mysterious
  + Tone – suspenseful
* Characters
  + Bernardo
  + Francisco part of the Danish army/night watch (patrol) all are loyal
  + Marcellus subjects to
  + Horatio the King of

Denmark

Plot

* The tense setting adds and enhances the plot (elements of suspense) Why are these men so jumpy?
* An officer, Bernardo, arrives at midnight to relieve Francisco from guard duty - - These are trained soldiers so their nervousness adds even more to the suspense.
* Apparition has appeared twice prior to this night.
* Ghost referred to as “this thing” (line 27) – it has not yet appeared tonight
* Lines 29 – 35 “Horatio says ‘tis but our fantasy…” – M to B that Hor. Has joined to watch to verify this theory that the ghost is a hallucination
* Lines 43 - 47 “Last night of all…” – describes ghost’s previous visit.
* Horatio tries to talk to it – as a scholar he speaks Latin and it was said that ghosts only spoke Latin. He is an even keeled person who others believe in.
* Lines 55 -58 “What art thou…” Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo encounter the silent apparition of King Hamlet. Hor. Questions the ghost but it leaves – ghost dressed in battlements/armour and looks like the buried King of Denmark.
* Lines 70 - 75 “As thou art to thyself…” the armour worn by the ghost is the same as King Hamlet’s when he defeated the Poles and fought against Fortinbras, the elderly King of Norway.
* Line 80 “This bodes some strange eruption in our state” (foreshadowing).
* Lines 91 - 119 – Hor. “That I can….” – military preparations are taking place at Elsinore because Young Fortinbras, the present King’s nephew seeks to reclaim the Norwegian lands his late father lost to King Ham. For this reason, Young Fort has raised an army from the rabble willing to fight for minimal wages
* Lines 124 – 137 – Pathetic Fallacy - when nature forewarns disaster – When Caesar died all natural “disasters” occurred. Hor compares the appearance of the ghost to the events that occurred in Rome right before the assassination of Julius Caesar.
* Allusion – reference to history, etc. that the audience is expected to know (Horatio I.i.124+) (reference to Caesar, Neptune)
* Ghost appears again – “cross it” 1) cross its path/confront it. 2) make the sign of the cross in front of it.

THEME: appearance vs. reality – is it real or not???

* All of this faith in Hor. shows he is reliable witness to the ghost’s appearance, that he is respected and trusted by his friends
* Rooster crows – indicates morning/dawn. The ghost must leave - - can’t be out in light
* Lines 179 – 187 “So have I heard….” Hor. tells the others that Ham. Must be informed of the ghost tonight
* Ghosts in Elizabethan times returned to complete:
* Unfinished business
* Is a demon; Satan’s messenger (to lead others to damnation) (Horatio thinks this may be why this ghost is here
* Bring warning
* Uncover buried treasure
* Need grace/forgiveness of sins
* Had improper burial

I. ii

* Scene set up:
* King Ham has been dead two months now
* Hamlet = protagonist
* Claudius = antagonist
* Claudius’ opening speech:
* Proves he is a man of decisions – knows what he wants and gets it
* l.8 “therefore our sometime sister, now our queen”
* Paradox = something that is said that seems untrue or false yet upon farther consideration it proves to be true.
* Awkward!!! King H has only been dead two months
* Says/shows and tries to prove taking the throne to be an act of patriotism for safety of Denmark
* Prince (young) Fortinbras of Norway has been preparing for was against Denmark to recover Norwegian lands conquered by King H
* Note the commonality that young Fort and H are in similar situations
* Claudius is a bit decisive in action shown in dealing with an aggressive behaviour of young Fort
* C does seem to be a strong King; even with all his faults he is capable/able King (decisive, intelligent, acts immediately)
* To put an end to these threats, C reports he has asked Corn & Volt to deliver letters he has written to old Fort (King of Norway, uncle to Young Fort) (l. 34-39)
* Kingdom/servants/EVERYONE showing loyalty to King
* Laertes – son of Polonius
* l. 52 – asking to go back to France (where he attends school).
* I.53-54 – shows loyalty to C to return to Denmark for coronation (where a King is crowned)
* l.63 – 64 – grants L. permission to go back to France
* l.65 “son” l.68 “sun” – pun; showing more importantly that H’s first words of the play are cryptic, ambiguous and sarcastic (catch our attention)
* l.66 “A little more than kin, and less than kind” Pun on kin/kind - - shows H’s dislike for C as a person. H asserts that he neither resembles C in nature (wants to admit his blood relation) nor does he feel kindly towards C.
* H does NOT want to be the son of C – shows how sick his mother & uncle make him
* \*This shows us H is still grieving
* Gertrude – H’s mother – l.69 – 74 “cast thy nighted colour off…” telling H to stop mourning your father –

lives eventually come to an end (simply – get over it – all that lives must die) Reinforces H=melancholy

* H’s following speech l.78-88 H saying his outward trappings/appearances of grief (moping, wearing black, behaviour, outer sadness) DO NOT do justice to his true inner feelings (his father’s death REALLY bothers him)
* C’s attempt as consoling/reason l.91+ C tries to reason with H by saying that all mourning must come to a reasonable end and that to prolong mourning is unnatural
* Later in speech C asks H to think of him now as a father b/c H is heir to the throne
* l.120-121 “go not to Wittenberg” G asks H to stay in Denmark instead of going back to school in Germany
* H agrees to stay
* C invites the court to celebrate H’s decision with a rouse (a toast where the King celebrated by having a cannon fired signalling that all in the kingdom stopped and shared a drink with the King)

**Hamlet’s First soliloquy** (alone on stage to share feelings/thoughts with audience)

* l.131-134 – “O, that this too too solid flesh would melt…” Proves his thoughts of suicide. Wants to disappear from the earth/fade away. Belief in God and God’s law of suicide being a sin is the ONLY thing preventing H from committing suicide.
* Shows H’s deep depression and his anger towards everyone
* Reference to garden l.137 “unweeded garden” his home is damaged, no longer useful. Re-emphasizes H’s anger with everyone, especially towards G
* We see motives behind his actions as the play unfolds in the soliloquys
* “Hyperion” – allusion
* l.145 + - remembers how G used to love King H “hang on him”
* This starts his rant on his mother and the incestuous marriage
* Using better language, he compares the virtues of his father with faults of C and accuses his mother of being unfaithful to his father’s memory
* l.148 “frailty, thy name is woman - ….” referring to his mother. Goes on about how she is feeble/weak – shows true anger with G’s marriage to C
* Sees this marriage as G’s sin – sees mother as a criminal – guilty of a sin that blots out the stars for H and affects/curdles his blood (incest)
* l.151+
* Allusion “Niobe” – a mother who wept for her children’s’ deaths
* Says a “beast”/animal with no emotion would have mourned/grieved death longer than his mother did
* “incestuous sheets” – cannon law (church law) considered marriage with deceased brother’s widow to be incestuous
* Note the harsh words he uses throughout the speech directed to his mother
* “I must hold my tongue” l.161 – but I will not say any thing
* Hor, B and M enter to break H’s emotional rant
* Hor and H are good friends (open, trusting and honest with each other)
* H asks why Hor is back – Hor replies for King H’s funeral (loyal to H and King H). H banters back “are you sure it wasn’t for my mother’s wedding” Hor can’t deny he was here for both as they were so close
* l. 183 – 184 “the could have used to same food at the funeral as the wedding \*\*\*so quick\*\*
* l.193+ Hor reveals to H that they have seen the ghost of King H. H in disbelief.
* l.202- 218 – describing the encounter
* There is a series of short Q & As – function – to increase tempo, increases interest and spurs H into action
* l.167-169 – H says he will join them during the night watch to try to see the ghost
* l.272 – end – H’s 2nd Soliloquy

Alone

“all is not well” H suspects foul play/

“foul play something is wrong

* Scene closes rhyming couplet
* This scene:
* H’s troubled mind due to his father’s death, mother’s sudden marriage
* Throne not necessarily passed to eldest son – both Norway and Denmark have brothers (not sons) on the throne as King through election

I. iii

* This scene:
* Establishes a family unit – Polonius
* Intro to Pol. (lord chamberlain), Ophelia and more insight into Laertes
* Reveals romance subplot between H and O
* l.1-4 - L plays the overprotective older brother giving O his advice before he goes back to France. Says to write him letters
* l.6-11 – L’s advice on H – it’s not real love – only temporary. Don’t take his intentions seriously. H’s royal birth means he must choose a wife carefully
* l. 13- 47 – advice con’t. L gives O little credit regarding her common sense (feeble woman idea once again noticed) l.20-24 – trying to convince O that H can’t be serious about her. Warning her about H (heartbreak) but in a kind and caring way
* l.48 – 54 – O listens but says she’ll take the advice but suggests he too practices what he preaches. Don’t

worry about me – but heed your own advice. Understands that L cares about her

* l.59- 85 – P. gives L a blessing but more of a lecture on a ‘gentleman’s code of honour/proper behaviour’ (11 pieces of advice)
* Keep your thoughts to yourself – do not voice your opinion, but if you do think before you talk
* Act wisely and with self-control – always be proper
* Cherish old and new friends but be cautious of everyone
* Don’t open up to too many people
* Don’t gamble
* Don’t fight/argue, but if you do…do it intelligently and finish them
* Listen (to advice) and speak little (don’t give advice)
* Don’t be cheap and dress well, but don’t overspend - present yourself well
* Don’t borrow or lend money
* Be honourable (P is concerned about public image and the family image/name)
* l. 82 – famous line – be true and honest with yourself (Ironic b/c P is only concerned with his own self-image in the public’s eye)
* L leaves for France
* P asks O what she and L were talking about. He then gives O advice
* l. 95-103 – says H will sleep with her then leave her - - will not commit/marry you (again, P seems to be wanting to not have the family name tarnished or does he really care about O and her feelings??) Echoes L’s warnings
* l.104-105 – O tries to tell P that H has admitted his love/affection for her honestly and truly
* l. 106+ P tells O to not to be stupid and put not put herself in a naïve situation (seems as if he doesn’t believe in love/emotion)
* l. 115- 116 & 118-119 – O saying H has been honourable and respectful (leads us to think they have not slept together and that the love is true – and that H is trustworthy, sweet and honest with how he feels)
* l.120 – end – P questions O about the relationship. He makes fun of her for thinking that H would be sincere in his attentions to her (nice father?!?!)
* l. 132-136 – do not believe his promises for they are not what they seem. They appear to be innocent but their purpose is to trick you
* At end of speech (l.136 – 140) tells her to end the relationship b/c nothing good will come of it. Give back all his things and break up with him
* l. 141 – O obeys without a question (patriarchal rule – daughter obeys father in all aspects of life regardless of her feelings/wants/needs) She will break up with H for the sake of her family (we feel pathos for her = she can’t be with the boy she loves due to her father).

\*\*\*\*Ophelia = goodness throughout the ENTIRE play.

* She is the good surrounded by evil/darkness.
* She is the epitome of innocence, beauty and goodness\*\*\*\*

I. iv

* H, Hor & M waiting on the platform for the ghost to appear
* l.1 – pathetic fallacy “the air bites…cold” – adds tension to the waiting
* l.9 – 13 noise in background is only C drinking and celebrating the festive season \*\*C partying contrasts H & the ghost (serious) H dislikes the practice of the rouse (drinking in excess)
* H’s speech/rant (l. 15 – 40)
* l.20-24 – h says the rouse will give Denmark a bad reputation of drunkardness
* Gives 3 reasons why a flaw may be present in a person:
* l.27 – by birth – absolves them of any responsibility for their actions
* l.30 – victim of Fate – his theory on human behaviour
* l. 31 – bad habits bring on the downfall
* l. 34 – 40 – saying a small defect will ruin the whole personality – man’s entire life can be a good one and then destroyed by another tragic flaw
* Ghost enters
* H is anxious and excited
* Asks if ghost is a good spirit or a wicked goblin?
* Why have you come for good or evil?
* Ghost beckons H - - signals H to follow it
* Hor and M say no – don’t go because it may hurt you/do you harm
* Remember H wants to commit suicide anyway so he says he will follow it as his life is worth so very little (l.71 – 74)
* l. 75 – 84 – Hor’s warning – what is if tries to drown you, throw you off a cliff, rob you of your ability to reason (a ghost was said to not be able to kill someone but they could plant the idea/persuade someone)
* H really wants to go with the ghost – Why??
* L.90 – 95 – H insists that he goes alone as the ghost only wants to see him
* H follows the ghost
* \*\*l.99 – **foreshadowing** – they KNOW something is not right
* H’s fate leads him to lead him in following.

Hamlet’s fate leads him to follow the ghost…the others follow them

I. v

* **\*\*This scene tells of the tragic tale of the ghost**
* l. 13- 27 - Ghost tells H how his spirit is forced to wander by night and suffer purgatorial fires by day until his sins have been forgiven
* l. 31-32 – admits he was murdered
* l. 33-35 – H accepts the ghost and accepts that he needs to fix it all - - revenge is vowed to be taken
* l. 40-45 – Ghost tells what really happened – Claudius killed Hamlet. Double meaning of serpent (serpent meaning Claudius) the snake is Claudius
* l. 46 – H knew/thought of this before; he suspected c killed King H
* l 47 + ghost was in fact murdered by C
* Says that C may have seduced G before the King’s death
* Ghost thinks he can smell the morning – so he will be quick
* Ghost tells of how C poured poison in his ear causing sudden death, but eyes are not on C (l. 63-75)
* b/c he was murdered, he is without sacraments to absolve him of his sins – he’s made to wander the earth from dusk until dawn until his sins are forgiven and he can gain admittance into Heaven (l.79 – 84)
* l.86 – 88 – H must not only avenge his father’s death to redeem his own honour but also as a public service to Denmark (to make things right)
* l.90 – 93 – In seeking revenge the Ghost warns H to spare his mother, G, b/c her own guilt and heaven will punish her enough come the time (let God judge her)
* l.97 – 117 – H soliloquy – the Ghost’s call for revenge has wiped out everything else in his mind. He wants to kill C
* Theme: honour and revenge (now clearly launched)
* l. 115 – 117 H swears to kill C
* Hor & M come into scene as they had followed H & Ghost - - they want to know what happened
* H says it was a good encounter, but he can’t share any more
* They convince H to reveal something about the encounter
* l. 134-145 – reveals there is a villain in Denmark, but he’s tricky and a complete fool
* l. 151 – “Honest Ghost” reveals the Ghost was not a demon but his father’s spirit in unrest
* l.157 – “never make known what you have seen tonight” keep this whole scenario a secret about what you have seen
* H makes them swear an oath after this (Ghost voices “Swear”) so Hor & M swear to not speak of the events
* l. 183 – 198 – H’s additional oath - - if he feigns madness (pretends he’s insane) no one will notice any of his bizarre behaviour (this is his ANTIC DISPOSITION) H lets Hor & M know his plan to act insane. FORESHADOWS his actions for the upcoming Acts
* l. 200 – end – H thanks his friends, tells the spirit to rest now as revenge will be sought, yet he curses the enormity of the task that lies ahead of him