*Hamlet* Act II

Act II is made up of only two scenes. Each scene is designed to take the details introduced in Act 1 and expand – thus creating more interest and excitement for the reader.

**Satire** – literature that blends critical attitude with wit and humour. The intention is to ridicule and poke fun of something or someone.

II. i

* In Polonius’ house
* We learn P is a meddlesome character
* This scene is an interlude to the main plot
* P. instructing his servant Reynaldo to go to take money to France but more-so to check up on Laertes
* P gives R instruction on how to make inquiries about L (R is there without L knowing)
  + L. 1-82 – conversation:
    - locate other Danes in Paris that know L and identify yourself as a friend of the family. (l. 8-14)
    - Then he should elicit information by suggesting a few activities similar to what the young men about town enjoy/indulge in (gaming, drabbing (prostitutes), drinking, fencing, swearing, fighting)
    - R thinks that this scheme would dishonour him, but P explains that this indirect method would be the best - - this dishonour reveals the unsavoury side of P for his later behaviour (P. thinks that spying is acceptable behaviour - - pay attention to what he does later in the play)
    - Tells R to make up stories about L to see what kind of reaction it brings/to see if anything similar has happened (l.46-52)
    - Remember P is more concerned about L ruining P’s reputation at court than the well being of his son
* O enters – distressed state
* O tells P how frightened she is of the state that Hamlet has presented himself to her
  + (l.94-110)
  + He appeared suddenly in her room
  + Disheveled and in disarray (unkempt, unclean, clothes falling off, not dressed appropriately) \*\*\* we know this is part of his antic disposition – H is using O
* L.111 – 117
  + Says they must report this to the King
  + Her description of his behaviour causes P to think that H is mad with love sickness because O has rejected his attention/love
* L.118-120 – O confirms that she has sent back H’s letters and not let him see her as P ordered
* L.121 – end
  + Says the King must know of H’s behaviour in order to prevent further problems
  + While telling the King of H’s love may anger C, more grief would come from keeping it a secret
* P’s chief concerns are not for O
* P’s role as King’s advisor, he must report the Prince’s unusual behaviour
* P is also eager to demonstrate his own wisdom and insight

II. ii

* The significance of the scene – the main characters make plans to entrap each other and in doing so, reveal their true nature and intentions
* L.1 Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are summoned to court by C
  + Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are old friends of Hamlet
* C’s opening speech:
  + C shows concern over H’s behaviour (bizarre)
  + C has chosen R & G (H’s friends) to see about H’s behaviour because they’ve been friends for years
  + H’d behaviour leads others to think it’s because of King H’s death (C is suspicious why H has gone mad)
  + \*\*both P and C are spying on their sons
* L. 19-25 – G says their mission will be helpful and much appreciated by the court (they will get paid for their service to King C)
* R&G agree to do their best in service to C – R&G are identical in character, manner and language (\*\*They do not know C’s underlying motive for wanting the information)
* \*\*\*This is the FIRST entrapment plan
* L. 43 + P reports the return of Cornelius and Voltimand, the two ambassadors sent to Norway
* L. 45 – C comments that P is always the bearer of good news (adds to P’s conceit)
* L.52 – P reveals he has found the cause of H’s strange behaviour (C says tell me – p says wait until after the meeting with Corn and Volt)
* L.59-60 – G comments that she’s sure it’s because of H’s father’s death and her hasty marriage
* L. 64 + - Vol. report
  + King of Norway has put a stop to Young Fort’s plans to invade Denmark
  + Instead he gave money to Young Fort to raise an army to invade Poland
  + He requests the Young Fort be given permission to march through Denmark territory enroute
* C says he’s happy with the report but will reply to the King of Norway’s request once he studies the situation \*\*\*TIME\*\*\* it’s been several weeks since H has first seen and spoke to the ghost (we know this because Volt & Corn have returned from Norway already)
* L. 91-101 – P says H does not follow his own advice, his speech provides comic relief in the mounting tragedy
  + L.96 – IRONY – he says getting to the point shows wisdom/understanding - - ironic because he is ALWAYS long winded and likes to hear himself speak
* G replies to get to the point (H’s given a wordy introduction about H)
* L.116 + P read letter from H to O. P says that H is mad/lovesick. Letter is a mixture of bad prose and verse (this proves H is not thinking straight and shows his infatuation with O). end of letter (P says) love is the source of H’s lunacy must be unrequited love (O rejecting his love)
* L.139 – 159 – P urges King and Queen to believe him because his conclusions have been proven correct in the past, but he will obtain additional information (\*\*\*STARTS THE 2nd ENTRAPMENT PLAN\*\*\*)
* P’s plan = let O & H meet while P and C hide behind a curtain (arras) and watch the encounter occur (again…P’s idea that spying is ok, also, he’s using O again)
* L.183-184 – P rushes everyone out so that he can question H
* H & P’s conversation
  + H talks in riddles
    - Fishmonger (could mean “pimp” – referring to O/using O for his own purposes
    - To advise P to safeguard his daughter’s virtues (innocence, chastity, goodness, etc)
    - Ridicules him
  + P interrupts (commonly with asides) to say that he think H is lovesick
  + H usually shows great respect for P because of high court position and his age so this is strange behaviour for H
  + “Conception is a blessing, but not as your daughter may conceive” Pun = conceive

1) understanding 2) becoming pregnant (l.198-200)

* P confirms his plan (aside) to have the two lovers meet and he will spy on them (l.222-228)
* H’s conversation with R&G (remember they are friends)
  + H joins in with their harmless banter until H suspects what they’ve been sent for
  + “Denmark’s a prison” – H referring that he feels trapped (like he’s in prison – observed, unhappy, confined) (l.258)
  + H reflects ideas on life – men are nothing but elongated shadows (empty, hollow = reflects that H feels his life is empty, worthless and filled with grief) (
  + H keeps asking why R&G are there/pushes them to admit the purpose of their visit
  + H KNOWS they are getting information for C (finally G admits they were sent for – l.307)
  + H tells them to report to their majesties that all joy has gone from H’s life and that he has lost interest in the world, in men (company/companionship) and even in women (Ophelia)
  + R replies that H will not take any enjoyment in the players coming to the castle if he’s lost enjoyment for life
  + They talk about children actors taking over the roles of older players
  + L.382 + H welcomes them again but adds that he is not as mad as their majesties believe (paradox)
  + L.390 – 91 – I know who is with me and who is against me
* Players (actors) enter kingdom
* P announces the players (H resumes his mad behaviour and mocks P (P unaware he’s being ridiculed) l.401 - 431
* Players enter
  + They tell the story of the play they will be performing
    - Note the play shows great contrast between Hecuba and Gertrude’s grief (Hecuba is Hector’s wife and she wept till she turned to stone over his death
    - H chats with the players – requests a “passionate speech” (l.143)
    - H requests the actors perform the “Murder of Gonzago” (547-48) \*\*\*this is H’s plan for C \*\*\*\*entrapment plan #3\*\*\*this play resembles the murder of his father, but H asks the players to add a little to it
  + Hamlet’s 3rd Soliloquy l.560 - end
    - At first he rails against himself that player could express so much emotion and impassioned grief and drama yet he can’t act against C in his real-life grief
    - Reflects on the story the player told – in the story the avenger, Pyrrhus, suffered momentary delay in killing Priam but recovered himself and went on to avenge his father, Achilles
    - H has done NOTHING to avenge his father’s murder
    - Once he denounces himself for being a coward and a villain he realizes that this anger is a pointless emotion and that he must get on with his task
    - Admits he is gutless
    - \*\*\*\*note we are seeing H’s tragic flaw – procrastination, not taking action, makes excuses, overthinking things\*\*\*
    - His plan to “Catch the conscience of the king” \*\*\*3rd entrapment plan - - we will observe C during the play to see if there are any signs of guilt of the murder of King Hamlet
* THE PLAN – have the players will perform The Murder of Gonzago before the King and court
  + During the play H will observe his uncle’s expressions for any flinching that would indicate guilt
  + H justifies this action by saying he needs substantial proof that his father was murdered by C because the ghost may have been the devil who assumed a “pleasing shape” to lead the Prince to damnation
  + H is staying true to being a scholarly character (intelligent) as he will “catch the conscience of the king”