

AP English Notes
November 17, 2004

Links for madness in Hamlet:

<http://www.humanities.ualberta.ca/morris/239/hamlet.htm>

http://www.wwnorton.com/introlit/drama_shakespeare8.htm

<http://www.bartleby.com/200/sw9.html>

<http://www.netcomuk.co.uk/~iandel/index.html>

Act Three, Scene Two

Hamlet has written a scene for the actors and he is instructing them on how to perform it. He tells them not to be overdramatic, but also "Be not too tame, neither" (3.2.15). The actors tell him they can perform it exactly as he desires it to be.

Polonius, Guildenstern and Rosencrantz arrive and Hamlet sends them all to make the actors hurry up and get ready. Horatio soon shows up and Hamlet tells him that one scene in the play that night directly mimics the murder of his father. He asks Horatio to, "observe mine uncle" (3.2.73) in order to determine whether the ghost was lying or not. They plan to meet afterwards and compare their separate judgments as to what the reaction of Claudius means.

Horatio goes to find a seat, and Claudius enters along with the rest of the court. He greets Hamlet and asks him how he is. Hamlet gives a nonsensical answer and then asks Polonius if he was an actor during his university days. Polonius says he was a good actor, and that he played Julius Caesar.

Gertrude asks Hamlet to sit by her, but he says, "No, good-mother, here's mettle more attractive" (3.2.99) and sits next to Ophelia instead. He proceeds to make bawdy comments to her, all of which Ophelia tries to respond to appropriately.

The actors come out onto the stage and proceed to perform a dumb show, a silent scene in which they enact the murder of a king through poisoning. Ophelia is confused by the show, but assumes it foretells the actual plot. The players emerge a second time and start to perform the actual play. They pretend to be a king and queen. The queen protests her love for the king, telling him that she will never consider marrying a second man. The king tells her that such vows are quickly forgotten, but the queen continues to swear she will never marry a second time.

Hamlet turns to Queen Gertrude and asks her what she thinks of the play. Gertrude tells him that the queen "protests too much" (3.2.210). Claudius is worried that the play may be offensive, and asks Hamlet what the play is called. Hamlet says, "The Mousetrap" (3.2.217), alluding to the fact that he wants to catch Claudius.

An actor named Lucianus arrives onstage, and Hamlet tells them that he is meant to portray the nephew of the king. Lucianus pours poison in the king's ears, and Hamlet comments that he kills the king in order to steal his estate. Ophelia informs Hamlet that Claudius has stood up out of rage, thereby stopping the performance. Hamlet happily replies, "What, frightened with false fire?" (3.2.244). Claudius demands light to shone on him and leaves the room, followed by everyone except Hamlet and Horatio.

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The two friends remain behind and Hamlet gleefully tells Horatio, "O good Horatio, I'll take the Ghost's word for a thousand pound" (3.2.263-264). Horatio agrees with him that Claudius is guilty. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive and tell Hamlet that the king is in a terrible mood and that Gertrude has sent for him. He agrees to meet with his mother soon, but they continue to ask him why he is so "distempered" (3.2.308). Hamlet gets mad at them for their insistence and grabs a recorder from one of the actors. He shows it to them and demands that Guildenstern play it. When he refuses, saying he does not know how, Hamlet says,

Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me, you would seem to know my stops...do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe?" (3.2.334-335,339-340).