

AP English Notes 18 November 2004

Proposed Thesis Statement for the Semester Research is Due Today!

Act Four, Scene Six

Horatio receives a letter from Hamlet which tells him a strange story. The ship Hamlet was on was caught by pirates, and Hamlet alone boarded the pirate ship. After the battle was over he became their prisoner but was treated well because he could do them a favor. Guildenstern and Rosencrantz are still on their way to England.

Act Four, Scene Seven

Claudius has explained to Laertes that Hamlet killed Polonius. Laertes asks why Hamlet was not punished at the time and Claudius says that it was for his mother's sake. Laertes tells Claudius that his revenge will come soon.

Some messengers arrive and hand Claudius letters from Hamlet. He is surprised to receive the letters, and reads his out loud. The letter indicates that Hamlet is returning to Denmark alone. Laertes is excited by this because it means that he will be able to revenge his father's death. Claudius asks him to "be ruled" and listen to a plot which will make Hamlet's death seem like an accident, even though Laertes will be allowed to kill him.

Claudius proposes that Laertes fight Hamlet in a fencing match with rapiers. Laertes agrees to this provided he be allowed to put poison on the tip of his rapier so that even the slightest scratch will cause Hamlet to die. Claudius is uncertain as to whether they can trust the poison, and so he offers to also create a poison drink for Hamlet. That way, they will have two ways of killing Hamlet and will not fail.

Gertrude enters the room and informs Laertes that Ophelia has drowned herself while sitting on a willow branch over a brook. Laertes is overcome with grief and starts to shed tears for his sister. He leaves the room but Claudius urges Gertrude to follow him for fear that Laertes will erupt in rage again.

Act Five, Scene One

Two gravediggers (clowns) are digging out Ophelia's grave. They discuss the fact that Ophelia drowned herself, and therefore should not receive a Christian burial under Christian law. However, the one gravedigger points out that the coroner has declared it a natural death rather than a suicide, and therefore they must dig the grave for her.

Hamlet overhears the first gravedigger singing to himself and remarks on the fact that the man is so cheerful at his occupation. Horatio tells him that it must come from doing the job for such a long time. Hamlet approaches the man and asks him whose grave it is. The gravedigger, taking every word literally, tells him, "Mine, sir" (5.1.109). Hamlet finally gives up asking and instead inquires for news about Prince Hamlet while pretending to be someone else.

The gravedigger tells him that Hamlet was sent to England because he was mad. He then informs Hamlet that a body will last in the grave for eight or nine years at the most. He picks up a skull and shows it to Hamlet, telling him it has been in the earth for twenty-three years. Hamlet asks whose skull it is, and is shocked to learn that it is the skull of Yorick, a jester who entertained him as a youth. He comments that even parts of Alexander the Great's body might now be used as a flask stopper and they would never know it.

Hamlet and Horatio run and hide when they hear Claudius, Gertrude, Laertes, and other attendants arriving. Hamlet wonders whose corpse they are carrying with them to the grave. He overhears Laertes arguing with the priest about the last rites. Due to the strange manner of Ophelia's death, the priest will only allow the body to be buried in holy ground, but he refuses to read her the prayers. Hamlet soon realizes that the body is that of Ophelia.

Laertes is so overcome with emotion once the coffin has been placed into the grave that he leaps in after it. Hamlet, seeing this, reveals himself and jumps into the grave as well. Laertes immediately grabs Hamlet by the throat and starts to choke him. Claudius orders the other men present to pull them apart and Hamlet shouts that he loved Ophelia more than forty thousand of her brothers combined. He tells Laertes that, "I loved you ever. But it is no matter. / Let Hercules himself do what he may, / The cat will mew, and dog will have his day" (5.1.275-278). Hamlet leaves and Horatio follows him.

Act Five, Scene Two

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Hamlet tells Horatio what really happened on the way to England. He rose on night and stole the letters that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were taking to the King of England. The letters told the king to kill Hamlet and listed several reasons why this would benefit both nations. Hamlet immediately wrote out several new letters and sealed them using his signet. The new letters ordered that the two men accompanying him should be put to death.

Hamlet is not at all upset about ordering his two "friends" to die in England since, "they did make love to this employment" (5.2.58). Horatio warns Hamlet that Claudius will soon discover what has happened when news arrives from England.

A man named Osric arrives and tells Hamlet that he has news from the king for him. Hamlet plays a game with the man, telling him to alternately put on and take off his hat. Osric finally gets frustrated with the game and informs Hamlet that Laertes, whom he describes in glowing terms, has placed a wager with Claudius. Claudius has bet Laertes that he cannot beat Hamlet by at least three hits in a fencing match with twelve passes. Hamlet agrees to the match and orders Osric to have them bring out the foils.

Lines (What do these lines mean? When are they spoken? Who says the line?)

Neither a borrower or a lender be (1.3.68)

Something is rotten in the state of Denmark (1.3.90)

The serpent that did sting thy father's life / Now wears his crown(1.3.39-40)

That one may smile and smile and be a villain (1.3.103-04)

There are more things in heaven and earth Horatio / Than are dreamed of in your philosophy (1.5.161-62)

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I (2.2.581)

The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king (2.2.638-39)

The lady doth protest too much, me thinks (3.2.221)

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