UNIT 5: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *HAMLET* II

UNIT STRUCTURE

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5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- discuss the major themes of the play *Hamlet*
- identify the important characters of the play
- comment on the language used by Shakespeare in the play
- make an assessment of the critical reception that the play has received since it was first performed
- appreciate the play in totality

5.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit should be studied in connection with the previous unit, as in both the units we have been discussing William Shakespeare and *Hamlet*—one of his greatest tragedies. In the previous unit, you have read about the life and works of William Shakespeare in brief. You have also learnt about the story of *Hamlet* from the act wise summary of the play provided in the previous unit. This unit mainly deals with the discussions of

the important aspects of the play like themes, characters and language.Besides, you will also get to read in some detail about the critical reception that the play has received since the time of its first performance.

5.3 READING THE PLAY *HAMLET*

In the following subsections, you will get an opportunity to discuss the play *Hamlet* in terms of the important themes, characters and the language used.

5.3.1 Major Themes

The following are some of the important themes in the play *Hamlet.*

The Political Background: *Hamlet* is a political play. Hamlet's friend Horatio beautifully showcases the historical and political contexts when he interprets the appearance of the ghost as an omen signalling a pending catastrophe for Denmark, for it is endangered by the prospect of an attack by a Norwegian army under the command of young Fortinbras. In the preceding year, the former King Hamlet had killed Fortinbras's father (who was then king of Norway) in single combat, and bydoing so won possession of Norwegian lands. The young Fortinbras is now preparing an army to regain his lost territory. Horatio and the guards are purposefully discussing the possible links between the threat of war and the appearance ofthe ghost.

The Problem of Hamlet's Delay: Critics, even today, would like to ask—why doesthe prince delay in taking his revenge on the man who murdered his father? As soon as he learns of the guilt of his uncle, Claudius,he promises to 'sweep' to his 'revenge' 'with wings as swift / As meditation' (I.v.29–31). And yet he does not kill the king immediately,and his delay costs the lives of his mother, Gertrude, his beloved Ophelia, her father Polonius, her brother Laertes, as wellas Hamlet's old friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Some

critics argue that his difficulties are external and point to the many impediments which stand in the way of his swiftly andeasily killing Claudius, such as the guards who normally surround the king and Hamlet's need to produce a publicly acceptable justification for his revenge before acting.

However, another important approach to explaining Hamlet's delay is the psychoanalytic approach developed by Sigmund Freud. First suggested by Freud himself in a footnote to *TheInterpretation of Dreams* (1900), and later developed byFreud's biographer and disciple, Ernest Jones, in a brief book called *Hamlet and Oedipus* (1949), this approach claims that the **Oedipus complex** accounts for Hamlet's failure to act. The prince hesitates to kill Claudius because he identifies too closely with his uncle as a man who has acted out Hamlet's secret desire, namely, to kill his father and marry hismother. Jones pointed to a considerable body of evidence within the play to support his claims. Hamlet's feelings towards his mother are certainly an important element in the play, in many respects more important than his feelings towards his father. And in his intensely dramatic encounter with hismotherin Act III, Scene IV, Hamlet does appear to lose emotional control and to dwell upon the sexual details of his mother's relation with his uncle with an obsessiveness.

Soliloquies of Hamlet: There are total seven soliloquies of Hamlet out of which four are very significant. These soliloquies reveal the mind of Hamlet, because they are the spontaneous outbursts of an anguished mind. These soliloquies are of great importance as they provide aglimpse into Hamlet's private thoughts, which are continually weighed against his public statements and actions. In his first soliloquy, which occurs in Act I, Scene II, we learn that Hamlet has an exalted opinion of his father, "So excellent a king, that was to this/ Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother," and a revulsion towards women stemming from his disgust at Gertrude's quick and incestuous remarriage to her brother-in-law Claudius: "Frailty, thy

nameis woman." The second soliloquy occurs in Act II when Hamlet laments: "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I?" It refers to his profound feeling of revenge as he knows that his main duty is to kill the present King of Denmark to avenge the murder of his father. The third important soliloquy "To be or not to be—that is the question" occurs in Act III, Scene I. This is the most important and often quoted soliloquy of the play *Hamlet* as it concerns the advantages and disadvantages of human existence and the acceptance of men's ability. It also refers to the choice between life and death through suicide.



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Soliloquy: It is a device often used in drama when a character speaks to himself or herself, relating thoughts and feelings, thereby also sharing them with the audience. Other characters, however, are not aware of what is being said. A soliloquy is distinct from a monologue or an aside: a monologue is a speech where one character addresses other characters; while an aside is a (usually short) comment by one character towards the audience, though during the play it may seem like the character is addressing him or herself.

When Hamlet delivers his most poignant third soliloquy, he reveals an inner torment and struggle with his inability to avenge his father's murder. "To be or not to be, that is the question: / Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer /The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, / Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, / And by opposing end them." At theend of this soliloquy as he meets Ophelia, Hamlet's anger against women resurfaces. He states that although he did loveher once because of her beauty, he now wants to banish her from his thoughts and states: "Get thee to a nunnery.Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?" An astounded Ophelia responds, "O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!" Immediately following this

declaration, King Claudius enters,with Polonius, stating that Hamlet's condition is not that of love, and demanding that he be sent speedily to England to avoid his danger to the state. "Madness in great ones must not unwatched go."

You should note that the soliloquies give us an impression of the complex nature of Hamlet's brooding. The forth important soliloquy occurs in Act IV, Scene IV where he makes a comparison between himself and Fortinbras: Fortinbras confident in his march towards victory and glory, and his own sloth, inaction and frustration.

Play Within a Play: Towards the end of Act II, Scene II, Hamlet displays his fulltheatrical skills as a consummate playwright and director,instructing the players to perform *The Murder of Gonzago*,asking them to memorise some dozen or so lines of his own composition which he will insert into the play. Hamlet is uncertain regarding the ghost's intentions, since it could easily be an evil spirit. Besides, he is uncertain as to how he should avenge his father's murder which he thinks to be a loyal duty.But, the opportunity arises with the arrival of the players to the court. Hamlet invites the king and the queen and requests the players to enact the murder of Gonzago. If Claudius responds with guilt, then what the ghost revealed is true. In any event, Hamlet decides to prove Claudius'sculpability: "The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch theconscience of the King."



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The learner should try to understand why Shakespeare had a play within a play. It reveals Shakespeare's own theory of play acting. When Hamlet tells the players neither to be too passionate nor to be too tame in enacting the play, you will at once understand that Shakespeare was actually referring to some of the important elements of acting a play.

Philosophy on Death: Act 5, scene 1 begins in a graveyard, with the entry of two clowns who have come to prepare Ophelia's grave. They question whether she is to be given a Christian burial as the possibility of her death being a suicide is left open. Hamlet and Horatio enter as one of the clowns sings while he digs, unaware that the grave being readied is for Ophelia. Holding up one ofthe skulls strewn about the graveyard, Hamlet reflects on the equality of death, where all earthly distinctions of social classand individual achievement are obliterated, and in so doing,introduces a common theme found in Renaissance texts—the *memento mori*—reminders of death. Among the skulls, Hamlet finds that of Yorick, the court jester and Prince Hamlet's beloved childhood playmate. In one of Shakespeare's most poignant speeches, Hamlet tells Horatio of his love for Yorick: "A fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath bore me on his back a thousand times, and now howabhorred in my imagination it is!" But Hamlet's reverie is interrupted with the arrival of Ophelia's funeral party, and he is startled to discover that the grave he has been standing by ishers.

Use of the Supernatural: In many of his plays, Shakespeare used the supernatural one of the main reasons being the fact that the Elizabethan audience enjoyed the supernatural considerably. Because they profoundly believed in the world of the supernatural which included ghosts, apparitions, spirits, witches etc. In the play *Hamlet* however, the supernatural is exclusively limited to the ghost of Hamlet's father. The ghost is first seen by the two night watchmen guarding the watch post. This has been reported to Horatio, Hamlet's most trusted friend, who easily recognizes the figure to be the dead king and reports to Prince Hamlet. Although the ghost does not speak either to the watchmen or to Horatio, it eventually speaks to Hamlet and tells that his father was murdered by his uncle Claudius who is now the King of Denmark. The supernatural brings about an aura of mystery and fear as the watchmen and Horatio had believed that the appearance of the ghost was a bad omen and that some evilness

was bound to befall on them. The appearance of the ghost is important to the plot of the play since it is after his revelation that Hamlet learns about his mother's adultery and his father's murder.

The Tradition of the Revenge Play: In writing the play *Hamlet*, Shakespeare chose to work within this tradition of the revenge play. You will find it interesting to note that he was not even the first to write a play called *Hamlet*. Because, most scholars agree that an earlier Elizabethan play on the subject once existed, conventionally referred to as the *Ur-Hamlet*, and probably written by Thomas Kyd (1558–94). Besides, we also have another revenge play by Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy* (*c.* 1585–90), which was by all evidence one of the most popular plays of the English Renaissance, and most probably the one which established the revenge play genre. *The Spanish Tragedy* has much in common with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, including a ghost calling for revenge and a play-within-the-play, together with a sustained exploration of the themes of madness and suicide.But what makes *The Spanish Tragedy* particularly relevant to *Hamlet* is that Kyd portrays his avenger, Hieronimo, as torn between the classical and Christian attitudes towards revenge.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Make a list of the important themes of the play *Hamlet*.

Q 2: Comment on Hamlet's problem of delay.

Q 3: What is the significance of the play-within-a-play?

Q 4: How many soliloquies are there in *Hamlet?* Why are they significant?

Q 5: Why does Shakespeare use supernatural elements in the play *Hamlet*?

Q 6: How does Hamlet philosophise on death?

5.3.2 Major Characters

The following are the most important characters in the play *Hamlet.*

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark:

Hamlet is the principal character of the play. Though the gravediggers in Act V, Scene I pinpoint Hamlet's age to be thirty, there is reason to believe that he may be younger. He is a student and is returning to Denmark to attend the funeral of his father and the remarriage of his mother to his uncle Claudius. Hamlet is visited by the ghost of his father which tells how he was murdered by Claudius, and commands Hamlet to seek revenge. Hamlet is deeply disturbed about his father's sudden death and his mother's quick marriage to Claudius. His suspicions are confirmed when the ghost of his father tells him to avenge his murder at the hands of Claudius.Much of the play is spent exploring Hamlet's complicated and disturbed mind between his promise to the ghost and his murder of Claudius in the play's final scene.

Old Hamlet:

Hamlet's father, the former King of Denmark,who was murdered by his brother Claudius. His ghost commands Hamlet to avengehis murder. Old Hamlet was apparently a powerful warrior in his day, having both conquered Poland and defeating the king ofNorway in single combat. Old Hamlet occupies a special placein Prince Hamlet's imagination. Hamlet repeatedly describes him as anideal of manhood, a representative of a heroic age that may be irretrievably lost.



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Ghost of Hamlet: The ghost of the former Kingof Denmark, Hamlet's father. He tellsHamlet to avenge his murder by his own brother Claudius.

Gertrude:

She is Hamlet's mother, the widow of Old Hamlet, andthe wife of Claudius. From her behaviour it is evident that she loves her son, but we do not know how she feels about her first husband. We also do not know anything about her relation to her second husband's guilt, or her son's accusations. On several occasions,she bitterly complains of Hamlet's failure to honour Old Hamlet's memory, and his ambivalence in responding to Ophelia. Gertrude is accidentally killed at the end of the play, when she drinks the poison intended for her son.

Claudius:

Hamlet's uncle who becomes King of Denmark by killing his brother, Old King Hamlet and marrying his widow Gertrude. Though troubled by a guilty conscience and provoked to further villainy by Hamlet's erratic behaviour, throughout the play Claudius attempts to maintain public order in Denmark. After plotting with Laertes to poison Hamlet duringa fencing match, Claudius is finally killed by Hamlet.

Horatio:

He is Hamlet's friend and the most trusted confidant. Horatio, like Hamlet,has studied at Wittenburg: he is presented as learned and reliable,though lacking the prince's imagination. Horatio assists Hamlet throughout the play. As Hamlet dies, he makes Horatio promise to report the truth on all that have taken place.

Polonius:

He is the father of Laertes and Ophelia, and advisor to Claudius. He likes to give advice, and he thinks Hamlet'smadness is due to his love for Ophelia. Hamlet kills Polonius by mistakewhen he is hiding behind a curtain in Gertrude's bedroom to spy on Hamlet.He is represented as a sententious, nosy old man. Polonius's death drives Ophelia mad, provokes in Laertes amurderous rage for vengeance, and convinces Claudius that Hamlet must be sent to England and quietly executed.

Ophelia

She is the sister of Laertes and daughter of Polonius.Though Hamlet has been courting her, Ophelia willingly obeysher father when he tells her to discourage the prince's advances.When Polonius is killed, she is driven mad and accidentally drowns herself. Ophelia is presented throughout the play as loving, innocent, and obedient.Victimised by the play's tragic actions, her madness and subsequent death are poignantly portrayed.

Laertes:

He is the son of Polonius and brother of Ophelia. At the beginning of the play, Laertes leaves for France, but returns in a rage at the news of his father's death. Laertes is presented throughout the play as Hamlet's peer, rival, and counterpart.His passionate desire to avenge his father's murder stands in marked contrast to Hamlet's inaction. In the final scene, Laertes is killed byHamlet.

Fortinbras:

He is the son of the late king of Norway. Like Laertes, Fortinbras functions as a foil for Hamlet in the play, for his desire to attack Denmark is also an attempt to avenge his father's death at the hands of Old Hamlet.Fortinbras and his army enter the Danish court during the play's final scene, just as Hamlet, Laertes, Claudius, and Gertrude are dying. Fortinbras finally assumes authority in Denmark.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern:

They are the old friends of Hamlet and the would-be courtiers summoned by Claudius and Gertrude to discover the root of Hamlet's melancholy. Hamlet soon understands that they are motivated only by their interest in the king's favour. Claudius sends them with Hamlet to England, and orders them to deliver his letter to the English king. This letter contains orders for Hamlet's execution, though it is not clear that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern know this. Hamlet steals the letter from them, and replaces it with a forged letter ordering their execution instead. As the play ends,the ambassadors from England arrive with the news that both of them have been killed.

Some minor characters:

Players: The members of an acting company who help Hamlet determine if Claudius is guilty of the murder of Old Hamlet. They put ona show called *The Mousetrap*.

Gravediggers: Two men who dig the grave for Ophelia and make grim jokes about death.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Who are the main characters of the play *Hamlet*?

Q 8: Who is Hamlet? How old is he?

5.3.3 Language

In the play *Hamlet*, Shakespeare uses early modern English which is sometimes difficult to understand.Yet, rather than serving as a barrier to understanding Shakespeare, the richness of his language should help you to appreciate Shakespeare. One of the most striking things readers usually notice while reading the play is the use of pronouns. For examples, words like “thou” (you), “thee” and”ye” (objective cases of you), and “thy” and “thine”(your/yours) appear throughout all of Shakespeare’s plays.

Another notable aspect of Shakespeare’s language is his use of Blank Verse. Though Shakespeare sometimes wrote in prose, he wrote most of his plays in poetry. Blank verse consists of lines in unrhymed*iambic pentameter—iambic* referring to the stress patterns of the line. An *iamb* is an element of sound that consists of the pattern in which an unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed. A good example of an iambic line is Hamlet’s famous line “To be or not to be,” in which you do not stress “to,” “or,” and “to,” but “be,” “not,” and “be.” *Pentameter* refers to the *meter* or number of stressed syllables in a line.*Penta*-meter has five stressed syllables.

Besides, the above mentioned aspects in Shakespeare's language, he also had afondness for wordplay. This word play often takes the forms of *puns,* where a word can mean more than one thing in a given context. Shakespeare often employs puns as a way of illustrating the distance between what is on the surface—*apparent* meanings—and what meanings lie underneath.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: Comment very briefly on the language used in the play *Hamlet*.

5.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

(adapted from Philips Edwards' *Hamlet Prince of Denmark*.)

No other work been so extensively written about than *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.* There are numerous histories,summaries and critical analyses of this great work. In the **18th century**, Hamlet was critically discussed because of certain sentimental aspects. For example, Dr Johnson (1765) spoke of the 'useless and wanton cruelty' of Hamlet's treatment of Ophelia, and of the speech in the prayer scene, when Hamlet's delay in killing Claudius for fear he will goto heaven, he said it was 'too horrible to be read or to be uttered'. The reader orthe audience has a right to expect the 'poetical justice' of the punishment of Claudius,but this expectation is thwarted by the death of Ophelia, and the death of Hamletas the price of killing the king. Johnson's brief remarks thus convey his strong sense of Hamlet's failure (and the weakness seems to him as much the author's as the prince's). On the other hand, George Steevens (1778) was strongly and unfavourably impressed by Hamlet's violence and callousness. Henry Mackenzie (1780) opined Hamlet was a man of exquisite sensibility and virtue 'placed in a situation in which even the amiable qualities of his mind serve but to aggravate his distress and to perplex his conduct'. Thus, *Hamlet* was

essentially taken to be a story of the inadequacy and impotence ofsensitivity in the face of the stern demands of action.

Almost every writer and thinker of the later **19th century** had his say about Hamlet. Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) found that Hamlet 'speaks more superficially than he acts'; and there is something deeper going on in the play than finds appropriate expression in the speeches. It is with *Hamlet* as with Greek tragedy 'the myth…never finds an adequate objective correlative in the spoken word'.

A. C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* of 1904, considered to be a masterly work on *Hamlet* was the most considered and extended examination which the play had up to that time received.It was an important assessment of *Hamlet* at the end of the 19th century, reviewing and assessing what had gone before, the last and greatest statement of a prevailing view of Hamlet (though the preceding review indicates that it had already been undermined).It is a view of Hamlet as a noble and generous youth who for reasons inexplicable to himself is unable to carry out a deed of punishment enjoined on himby divine authority. What causes this paralysis? It is not conscience, it is not theimmorality of revenge, it is not the frailty of his nature nor the fatal habit of contemplation. Hamlet procrastinates, Bradley argues, because his true nature is blanketed by the melancholy ensuing from the death of his father and his mother's remarriage. It is this affliction which inhibits the fulfilment of his purposes and makes him seek any excuse for delay. Bradley's book as a whole was dismissive of the religious element in Shakespearean tragedy and Elizabethan drama as a whole (it was 'almost wholly secular'),but he saw *Hamlet* as something of an exception.While *Hamlet* certainly cannot be called in the specific sense a 'religious drama', there is in it nevertheless both a freer use of popular religious ideas, and a more decided, though always imaginative, intimation of a supreme power concerned in human evil and good, than can befound in any other of Shakespeare's tragedies.

The understanding of the play *Hamlet* in the **20th century** owes as much to writers and thinkers who were not professional scholars as to the scholars themselves. A good example of this is the influence of Freud, whose mere footnote on Hamlet's Oedipus complex in *The Interpretation of Dreams*

in 1900 has had gigantic influence. Ernest Jones builton this in 1910 for the first of his several psychoanalytic studies *on Hamlet,* arguing that Hamlet's problems were caused by his unconscious wish to supplant his father and lie with his mother. Psychoanalytic explanations of Hamlet's delay lurk behind T. S. Eliot's lofty and capricious essay of 1919: 'The play is most certainly an artistic failure', because Shakespeare was unable to transform the intractable material he inherited from the old play and the sources into a vehicle or 'objective correlative'capable of conveying the issues and emotions which it strives to express. Hamlet's emotions are 'in *excess* of the facts as they appear'. Shakespeare's failure lay in trying to convert a father-and-son play about revenge into a mother-and-son play about – something else. The reason he could not get it into shape was the extent of his own hang-ups.

One of the most striking and important contributions during the first half of the twentieth century was George Wilson Knight's essay, 'The Embassy of Death' in*The Wheel of Fire* (1930). Knight refused to accept Hamlet's jaundiced view of the Danish court when he said that "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark". Denmark is a healthy and contented community with Claudius as its efficient and kindly administrator, sensibly not wishing to let memories of the past impede the promise of the future. By contrast, Hamlet is a figure of nihilism and death. He has been poisoned by his grief, and he has communed with the dead. He has been instructed never to let the past be forgotten.He is 'a sick soul... commanded to heal' and is in fact a poison in the veins of the community, 'an element of evil in the state of Denmark'.

Twentieth-century critics offer even more interesting critical remarks on Hamlet. For example,Middleton Murry stressed that Hamlet's fear of damnation was an immensely important factor in the play, overlooked by us because we provide Shakespeare's tragic heroes 'with every modern convenience' including our indifference to an after—life.E. M. W. Tillyard in his *Shakespeare's Problem Plays*(1950) wrote: 'In *Hamlet* or anywhere in Shakespeare we notice the genealogy from the Miracle Plays with their setting of Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell…*Hamlet* is one of the most medieval as well as one of the most acutely modern of Shakespeare's plays'. C. S. Lewis's

British Academy Shakespeare Lecture of 1942, 'Hamlet: the prince or the poem?'is another important criticism of hamlet in which he states that the particularity of Hamlet as a character was as unimportant as the particularity of revenge. Hamlet is 'not "a man who has to avenge his father" but "a man who has been given a task by a ghost"'.

Thus, you can see that the play *Hamlet* met with different critical reception in the recent periods.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: How was Shakespeare's *Hamlet* received in the 18th century?

Q 11: Discuss the significance of A. C. Bradley's book on Shakespeare's tragedies.



5.5 LET US SUM UP

From your reading of the unit, it is clear to you that *Hamlet* is one of the greatest tragedies of the world. The number of studies of *Hamlet* increased enormously as the academic study of English literature grew. You must have understood by now that a great deal of attention has now been given to the difficult problem of the text of the play; to its sources, to the relationship of the play with its predecessor; to its date; to the status of the first quarto; to the theatrical conventions of therevenge play; to theatre conditions and audience response; to contemporary history; to contemporary thinking about spirits and ghosts, second marriages, melancholy, incest, elective monarchies, purgatory and punctuation and so on.



5.6 FURTHER READING

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2) Bloom, Harold. (ed). (2004). *William Shakespeare's Hamlet*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers.

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4) Edwards, Philips. (ed). (2003). *Hamlet Prince of Denmark.* Cambridge University Press.

5) Hibbard, G. R. (ed). (1994). *The Oxford Shakespeare Hamlet*. Oxford University Press.

6) Knight, G. Wilson. (1962). *The Wheel of Fire*. Cleveland: World Publishing.

7) Lamb, Sidney. (ed). (2000). *Cliffs Complete Shakespeare's Hamlet*. New York: Hungry Minds, Inc.

8) Levin, Harry. *The Question of Hamlet.* London: OUP, 1959.

9) McEvoy, Sean. (2000). *Shakespeare: The Basics.* London: Routledge.

5.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: The Political Background, The Problem of Hamlet's Delay, Play within a play, Soliloquies of Hamlet, Use of the Supernatural, Philosophy on Death, The Tradition of the Revenge Play and so on.

Ans to Q No 2: Critics are bewildered to think why the prince delays in taking his revenge on the man who murdered his father. Although he decides to kill Claudius 'with wings as swift / As meditation' (I.v.29–31), yet he does not kill the king immediately,and his delay costs the lives of his mother, Gertrude, his beloved Ophelia, her father Polonius, her brother Laertes, as wellas Hamlet's old friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Although there may be external reasons, according to Ernest Jones, the prince hesitates to kill Claudius because he identifies too closely with his uncle as a man who has acted out Hamlet's secret desire, namely, to kill his father and marry his mother.

Ans to Q No 3: Hamlet is uncertain regarding the ghost's intentions, since it could easily be an evil spirit. Besides, he is uncertain as to how he should avenge his father's murder which he thinks to be a loyal

duty. But, the opportunity arises with the arrival of the players to the court. Hamlet invites the king and the queen and requests the players to enact the murder of Gonzago. If Claudius responds with guilt, then what the ghost revealed is true. In any event, Hamlet decides to prove Claudius's culpability: "The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King."

Ans to Q No 4: There are total seven soliloquies of Hamlet out of which four are very significant. These soliloquies reveal the mind of Hamlet, because they are the spontaneous outbursts of an anguished mind. These soliloquies are of great importance as they provide a glimpse into Hamlet's private thoughts, which are continually weighed against his public statements and actions.

Ans to Q No 5: In many of his plays, Shakespeare used the supernatural one of the main reasons being the fact that the Elizabethan audience enjoyed the supernatural considerably. Because they profoundly believed in the world of the supernatural which included ghosts, apparitions, spirits, witches etc. In the play *Hamlet* however, the supernatural is exclusively limited to the ghost of Hamlet's father.

Ans to Q No 6: Act V, Scene Ibegins in a graveyard, with the entry of twoclowns who have come to prepare Ophelia's grave. They question whether she is to be given a Christian burial as the possibility of her death being a suicide is left open. Holding up one ofthe skulls strewn about the graveyard, Hamlet reflects on theequality of death, where all earthly distinctions of social classand individual achievement are obliterated. Among the skulls, Hamlet finds that of Yorick, the court jester and Prince Hamlet's beloved childhood playmate. But Hamlet's reverie is interrupted with the arrival of Ophelia's funeral party, and he is startled to discover that the grave he has been standing by ishers.

Ans to Q No 7: Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, Old Hamlet, Gertrude, Claudius, Horatio, Polonius, Ophelia, Laertes, Fortinbras.

Ans to Q No 8: Hamlet is the principal character of the play. He is the Prince of Denmark. Hamlet's age is around thirty, but he may be

younger also as he is a student and is returning to Denmark to attend the funeral of his father and the remarriage of his mother to his uncle Claudius.

Ans to Q No 9: In the play *Hamlet*, Shakespeare uses early modern English which is sometimes difficult to understand. One of the most striking things is the use of pronouns. For examples, words like “thou” (you), “thee” and”ye” (objective cases of you), and “thy” and “thine”(your/ yours) appear throughout all of Shakespeare’s plays.Another notable aspect is his use of Blank Verse. Though Shakespeare sometimes wrote in prose, hewrote most of his plays in poetry.

Ans to Q No 10: In the **18th century**, Hamlet was critically discussed because of certain sentimental aspects. For example, Dr Johnson (1765) spoke of the ‘useless and wanton cruelty’ of Hamlet’s treatment of Ophelia, and of the speechin the prayer scene, when Hamlet’s delay in killing Claudius for fear he will go to heaven, he said it was ‘too horrible to be read or to be uttered’. George Steevens (1778) was strongly and unfavourably impressed by Hamlet’s violence and callousness. Henry Mackenzie (1780) opined Hamlet was a man of exquisite sensibility and virtue ‘placed in a situation in which even the amiable qualities of his mind serve but to aggravate his distress and to perplex his conduct’.

Ans to Q No 11: A. C. Bradley’s *Shakespearean Tragedy* of 1904, has been the most considered and extended examination Shakespeare’s tragedies.It was an important assessment of *Hamlet* at the end of the 19th century, reviewing andassessing what had gone before, the last and greatest statement of a prevailing view of Hamlet. Bradley stated that Hamlet procrastinates because his true nature is blanketed by the melancholy ensuing from the death of his father and his mother’s remarriage.



5.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss Hamlet as a revenge tragedy. Comment on Hamlet as a tragic hero.

Q 2: Discuss the dilemma which Hamlet is faced with after he meets the ghost. How does he resolve it?

Q 3: Examine the significance of the soliloquies of *Hamlet*. How do they reflect on the tormented mind of the protagonist?

Q 4: Comment on Hamlet's madness in the play *Hamlet*.

Q 5: Critically examine the problem of delay in taking revenge on the part of Hamlet.

Q 6: Comment on the use of the supernatural elements in the play *Hamlet*.

Q 7: Do you think that *Hamlet* is a political play? Discuss with reference to the political context of the play.