

- Hamlet is “*desperately concerned with the nature of truth*” (Hytner) and he desperately wants to be true to himself
- Regime built on a lie (C’s murder) and spying – dishonesty is a concept of performance
- ‘Show’ is what the court does – “*theatre is a loaded and complex metaphor in the play*” (Hytner)
- “*Elsinore is show business*” – Hytner
- “*Almost everything contains its opposite*” – Hytner
- Metaphor flips at performance – moves from everything that is false to a “*scalpel that cuts through to reality*” (Hytner) – 2010 Gonzago played by King Hamlet and players arrested after play
- Hamlet “*wants to be more truthful to himself and the world than is possible*” (Hytner) – his tragedy is demanding the world to be truthful to him

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Page 7 of 16

Characterisation

Hamlet

- *"The character is consistent. Hamlet is exhibited with good dispositions, and struggling with untoward circumstances."* William Richardson
- Dichotomy presented as prince expected to be the one with free choice and luxury but he is seen as the most dangerous and has become the most watched – he has infinite comfort but infinite restriction
- Hamlet is juxtaposed greatly against the other young men
- *"Hamlet is constantly trying to get beyond show to the truth"* – David Hytner, *"he is an idealist in a society where that is frowned upon"* – Rory Kinnear
- Anger is prompted by Gertrude's remarriage. From the start he is resentful of Claudius (*"A little more than kin, and less than kind"*) but the fact this statement is an aside is significant – he can't express this directly) and his mother's suicide is already driving him to consider suicide – *"that the Everlasting had not fixed / His canon 'gaist self-slaughter"*. Whilst he is distressed by learning of Claudius's crime, it seems that the true drive of his anger is Gertrude's betrayal. This is highlighted in his focus on incest and her (e.g. *"a father killed, a mother stained"*) – *"the text never states or implies that Gertrude gives or receives the ... 'reechy kisses' that so obsess ... the imagination of Hamlet and the Ghost"* (Rebecca Smith)
- His 'fatal flaw' (hamartia – Aristotle's tragedy) is his procrastination but this shows how humane a character he is. Philip Edwards writes *"there can be no question about the extent of Hamlet's failure"* but this is unfair, he may bring about deaths in killing Polonius but it is not a failure that he takes so long to kill Claudius – the audience must remember the difficulty of the task the ghost actually gives him is. *"In order to do the part of the revenger, he must become a bloody villain himself"* (John Hunt) but he fundamentally is not this character – he is noble and an intellect. *"The fact that Hamlet feels inadequate does not necessarily mean that he is inadequate"* – NA Alexander.

Claudius

- *"Machiavelli states that [a king] should seem to have [certain virtues] ... a good king must be a good actor"* Jonny Patrick - CHARACTER OF CLAUDIUS

Ghost

- *"The ambiguity of the ghost is of fundamental importance"* – Philip Edwards
- Elizabethan England underwent significant religious change – Henry VII's move away from the Catholic Church opposed to Mary Tudor's later switch back to Catholicism, then Protestant Elizabeth took the throne. There was a tense and ambiguous religious atmosphere in 16th century England. Affected how people saw ghosts.
- Catholics believed that after death, souls were sent to Heaven, Hell or Purgatory. If souls were sent to purgatory, they were to work off their sins until allowed into heaven. To Catholics, ghostly apparitions would be the souls of the dead now wandering the earth until they had access to Heaven. Protestants did not believe in purgatory but they did concede that ghosts existed. They thought ghostly apparitions were demons, sent from Hell to seduce people into performing crimes or unholy acts.