



جامعة تكريت

كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية

قسم اللغة الإنكليزية

المرحلة الثالثة

مادة المسرحية

*Hamlet* – Act Two: Text Analysis

م. امين عبدالواحد خلف

2025-2026

## *Hamlet* – Act One: Text Analysis

### Hamlet's Madness and the Arrival of the Players

#### Introduction

In this act of *Hamlet*, Shakespeare develops the central conflict of the play by exploring the mystery surrounding Hamlet's strange behavior. Following the Ghost's revelation that King Claudius murdered Hamlet's father, Hamlet begins to behave in an unusual and confusing manner. His actions raise an important question that continues throughout the play: **Is Hamlet truly mad, or is he only pretending to be insane?** At the same time, Shakespeare introduces the arrival of a group of actors, an event that becomes a turning point in Hamlet's search for the truth. These scenes develop important themes such as appearance versus reality, deception, revenge, and the search for justice.

---

#### 1. Ophelia Reports Hamlet's Strange Behavior

The act begins when Ophelia visits her father, Polonius, in a state of fear and confusion. She tells him that Hamlet came to her looking disturbed and emotionally unstable. His appearance was alarming: his clothes were untidy, his face was pale, and his behavior was silent and unsettling. Instead of speaking normally, Hamlet simply stared at Ophelia, held her wrist, sighed deeply, and left without saying much.

To Ophelia, Hamlet's behavior is frightening because it is completely different from the noble and intelligent prince she once knew. However, Polonius immediately reaches his own conclusion. He believes that Hamlet has become mad because Ophelia has rejected him according to Polonius's earlier

command. Since Ophelia stopped meeting Hamlet and refused to receive his letters, Polonius assumes that Hamlet's disappointment in love has caused him to lose his sanity.

Polonius's interpretation reflects one of his major weaknesses as a character. He often believes he understands people perfectly, yet his conclusions are frequently incorrect. Instead of considering other possible explanations for Hamlet's strange behavior, he confidently attributes everything to romantic disappointment. Shakespeare uses this misunderstanding to create dramatic irony because the audience already knows that Hamlet's true emotional struggle comes from discovering that his father was murdered by Claudius.

---

## **2. Claudius and Gertrude Investigate Hamlet's Behavior**

Concerned about Hamlet's unusual conduct, King Claudius and Queen Gertrude also seek an explanation. Although Gertrude sincerely worries about her son's emotional condition, Claudius has another reason for his concern. He fears that Hamlet's strange behavior may threaten his own security as king.

To discover the truth, Claudius invites Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two of Hamlet's childhood friends, to Elsinore Castle. He asks them to spend time with Hamlet, gain his confidence, and secretly observe his behavior. Claudius hopes they will identify the cause of Hamlet's apparent madness and report everything back to him.

This action reveals Claudius's suspicious nature. Instead of speaking honestly with Hamlet, he chooses to spy on him through trusted companions. Shakespeare therefore continues developing the important theme of deception. Throughout the play, many characters pretend to be something

they are not, while others secretly observe conversations and manipulate events behind the scenes.

Meanwhile, Polonius confidently informs Claudius and Gertrude that he has already discovered the cause of Hamlet's madness. According to him, Hamlet is suffering because Ophelia has rejected his love. To prove his theory, Polonius suggests arranging a meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia while he and Claudius hide nearby and secretly watch their conversation.

This plan further emphasizes the atmosphere of secrecy that dominates the Danish court. Rather than communicating openly, the characters constantly observe, deceive, and test one another.

---

### **3. Hamlet's Conversation with Polonius**

Before the planned meeting with Ophelia takes place, Hamlet encounters Polonius in one of the castle halls. During their conversation, Hamlet speaks in a strange, confusing, and often humorous manner. His responses are filled with wordplay, sarcasm, and hidden meanings.

Polonius struggles to understand Hamlet's words. Although he notices that Hamlet's speech contains clever ideas, he still believes that the prince is mentally unstable. Hamlet intentionally mocks Polonius, calling attention to his age and foolishness without directly insulting him.

This scene illustrates Shakespeare's remarkable use of language. Hamlet's apparent madness is carefully controlled. His confusing speech allows him to hide his true thoughts while simultaneously criticizing the corruption around him. The audience begins to realize that Hamlet's madness is not entirely

genuine. Instead, it appears to be a deliberate strategy designed to confuse those who wish to spy on him.

The scene also reinforces the theme of **appearance versus reality**. Hamlet appears to be irrational, but beneath his strange behavior lies a sharp and intelligent mind. In contrast, Polonius believes himself to be wise, yet he repeatedly misunderstands Hamlet's intentions.

---

#### **4. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Visit Hamlet**

Soon afterward, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern meet Hamlet. They pretend that their visit is simply a friendly reunion. However, Hamlet quickly realizes that they have not come voluntarily. Through careful questioning, he discovers that they were sent by the king and queen to observe him.

This moment demonstrates Hamlet's intelligence and psychological insight. Although others believe he has lost his reason, he easily recognizes deception. His ability to expose Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's hidden purpose suggests that his mind remains clear despite his unusual behavior.

Hamlet openly expresses his disappointment that his old friends have agreed to spy on him. Their betrayal highlights another important theme in the play: the difficulty of distinguishing true friendship from political loyalty. In the royal court, personal relationships are often sacrificed in favor of serving those in power.

Despite the uncomfortable situation, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern share one piece of news that genuinely interests Hamlet. They inform him that a

travelling group of actors has arrived at Elsinore Castle and is ready to perform before the royal court.

---

## **5. The Arrival of the Players**

The arrival of the actors marks one of the most significant turning points in the play. Hamlet warmly welcomes the performers and asks one of them to recite a dramatic speech. The emotional performance reminds Hamlet of the extraordinary power of theatre to move people's emotions.

Hamlet is deeply impressed that an actor can express genuine sorrow for an imaginary character, while he himself has not yet acted to avenge the murder of his own father. This comparison causes him to criticize himself for delaying his revenge.

Hamlet arranges for the actors to perform *The Murder of Gonzago* before the royal court the following evening. However, he decides to write several additional lines that closely resemble the murder described by the Ghost. His goal is to create a performance that mirrors King Hamlet's death.

This decision demonstrates Hamlet's intelligence and caution. Instead of killing Claudius immediately, he wants convincing proof that the Ghost has told the truth. Hamlet fears that the Ghost could be an evil spirit attempting to deceive him. Therefore, he chooses to test Claudius's conscience before taking action.

---

## **6. Hamlet's Soliloquy and the "Play within the Play"**

After everyone leaves, Hamlet delivers another important soliloquy. In this speech, he criticizes himself for failing to act despite knowing that his father

was murdered. He compares himself unfavorably with the actors, who can display powerful emotions for fictional stories, while he has delayed responding to a real crime committed against his own family.

Hamlet then develops one of the most famous plans in Shakespeare's works. He believes that watching Claudius during the performance will reveal whether he is guilty. If Claudius reacts with fear or anxiety when he sees a murder resembling his own crime, Hamlet will know that the Ghost spoke the truth.

This famous plan becomes known as "**The Mousetrap**," because Hamlet hopes the play will trap Claudius by exposing his guilty conscience. Shakespeare presents theatre not merely as entertainment but as a powerful instrument for revealing hidden truths. Art becomes a means of uncovering reality where direct questioning has failed.

---

## **7. Claudius Continues His Investigation**

The following day, Claudius and Gertrude ask Rosencrantz and Guildenstern what they have learned from Hamlet. They admit that they have discovered very little. Although Hamlet welcomed them politely, he never revealed the true reason for his strange behavior.

The only useful information they provide concerns Hamlet's excitement over the visiting actors and his invitation to the royal family to attend the evening's performance.

Claudius remains suspicious and unconvinced. Since his questions have produced no clear answers, he instructs Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to

continue observing Hamlet closely. Once again, Shakespeare emphasizes the atmosphere of surveillance and distrust that dominates life at Elsinore Castle.

---

## **Conclusion**

These scenes play a crucial role in the development of *Hamlet*. Shakespeare deepens the mystery surrounding Hamlet's apparent madness while showing that many characters misunderstand his behavior. Polonius mistakenly believes that love for Ophelia has driven Hamlet insane, whereas Claudius suspects a more dangerous explanation. Meanwhile, Hamlet skillfully hides his true intentions behind a mask of madness.

The arrival of the actors introduces one of the most brilliant strategies in the play. Instead of seeking immediate revenge, Hamlet chooses to use drama as a means of discovering the truth. This decision reflects both his intelligence and his moral caution. Through these events, Shakespeare explores enduring themes such as deception, appearance versus reality, friendship and betrayal, justice, and the conflict between thought and action.