

Hamlet

SYNOPSIS

The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

Prince Hamlet's friend Horatio is shown by two sentries how the ghost of old King Hamlet appears. The dead king was succeeded by his brother Claudius, who married Gertrude, the old king's wife. Prince Hamlet, already upset by his father's death and his mother's hasty remarriage, sees no purpose in his life. Now his father's ghost tells him that he was murdered by his own brother and demands revenge. Hamlet is unsure what the ghost is or whether it is telling the truth.

Hamlet pretends to be mad to hide his intentions. Polonius, the old councillor, believes that his madness is caused by unrequited love for his daughter Ophelia. Her brother Laertes, leaving for university, tries to advise Ophelia and also receives advice himself from Polonius. Polonius suggests to the King that they should spy on Hamlet to find out if his theory is correct. When they observe Hamlet meeting Ophelia, he violently rejects her.

Two old friends of Hamlet's, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, have also been sent for by the King and Queen to try to find out what is wrong with Hamlet. Then a company of actors arrive, and Hamlet asks them to perform a play, hoping that its similarity to the ghost's story will make Claudius show his guilt. During the performance, Hamlet's suspicions are confirmed.

He decides to kill Claudius, but hesitates when he sees him praying. He then confronts his mother, but the ghost reappears and tells him not to harm her. Hearing a noise, he thinks Claudius is listening behind the tapestry and stabs through it, but kills Polonius by mistake.

The King sends Hamlet to England, with letters saying that he should be murdered there. Young Fortinbras, the son of Old Fortinbras, King of Norway, who had fought against old King Hamlet, is given permission to take an army across Denmark to Poland. Ophelia, driven mad by her father's death and Hamlet's rejection, is found drowned in the river. Laertes, on his return, demands revenge. Hamlet also returns, having been freed when pirates attacked his ship, and finds a new grave being dug by the gravediggers. He meditates on death, before discovering that the grave is for Ophelia. Hamlet confronts Laertes at the graveside. The King urges Laertes to pretend to be reconciled, and then to kill Hamlet at a fencing match at which he will have a poisoned sword. To make sure Hamlet dies he also provides a poisoned drink. However, Gertrude drinks the poison, and the swords are swapped after Hamlet has been wounded, so that Laertes dies too, after telling Hamlet what has happened. Hamlet kills the king before dying himself. News also arrives that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have been killed because Hamlet altered the King's letters. Only Horatio is left when Young Fortinbras of Norway arrives and claims the kingdom.

Media:

DVD:

To Be Or Not To Be (1942), dir. Ernst Lubitsch (Hollywood comedy about a group of actors in wartime Poland)

Hamlet (1948), dir. Laurence Olivier

Hamlet (1964), dir. Grigori Kozintsev (Russian version)

Hamlet at Elsinore (1964), dir. Philip Saville, with Christopher Plummer

Hamlet (1969), dir. Tony Richardson, with Nicol Williamson

Hamlet (BBC TV Shakespeare 1980), dir. Rodney Bennett, with Derek Jacobi

Hamlet (1990), dir. Franco Zeffirelli, with Mel Gibson

Hamlet (1990), dir. Kevin Kline

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead by Tom Stoppard (1991), dir. Tom Stoppard

The Lion King (1994) (Disney animated film using elements from *Hamlet*)

A Midwinter's Tale / In The Bleak Midwinter (1995), dir. Kenneth Branagh (a desperate jobless actor decides to put on *Hamlet*)

Hamlet (1996), dir. Kenneth Branagh (complete text)

Hamlet (2000), dir. Michael Almereyda, with Ethan Hawke (modern adaptation set in New York)

Brook by Brook: The Tragedy of Hamlet (2002), a portrait of Peter Brook by his son

Hamlet by Ambroise Thomas (2007), French 19th century opera based on Hamlet

Shakespeare: The Animated Tales Act 3 (2007), *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*

Hamlet (2009), dir. Greg Doran (RSC with David Tennant)

Hamlet 2 (2009), dir. Andrew Fleming (parody on High School movie or teacher saves minority movie with slight connection to Shakespeare)

CD Audio:

Hamlet (Naxos), with John Gielgud

Hamlet (Arkangel Complete Shakespeare), with Simon Russell Beale

PC game:

Hamlet (a time-traveller returns to Hamlet's world)

[Michael Mitchell]