

Hamlet: Parental Revenge Drama

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Hamlet, written between 1599-1602, is a dynamic revenge tragedy that was produced during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I of England. As a revenge drama, the play positions its protagonist, Hamlet (Prince of Denmark), in the role of avenger because of the evil deed committed against his father, Old King Hamlet, who was murdered by his own brother, Claudius. This familial issue is the focus of the main plot, which involves Hamlet, the Ghost of Old Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, Laertes, and Horatio. Beyond committing fratricide, Claudius also marries his deceased brother's wife and consequently becomes Hamlet's "uncle-father," adding an incestuous air to a play that maintains a surplus of dramatic tensions related to such topics as gender, marriage, death, politics, betrayal, and justice, to name a few. In addition to being Shakespeare's longest and most psychologically complex drama, *Hamlet* is often considered to be one of the most noteworthy English tragedies that was ever written. For centuries, the play has been the focus of myriad theatrical productions, film adaptations, and critical analyses that, together, exemplify the global interest in the literary phenomenon that is *Hamlet*.

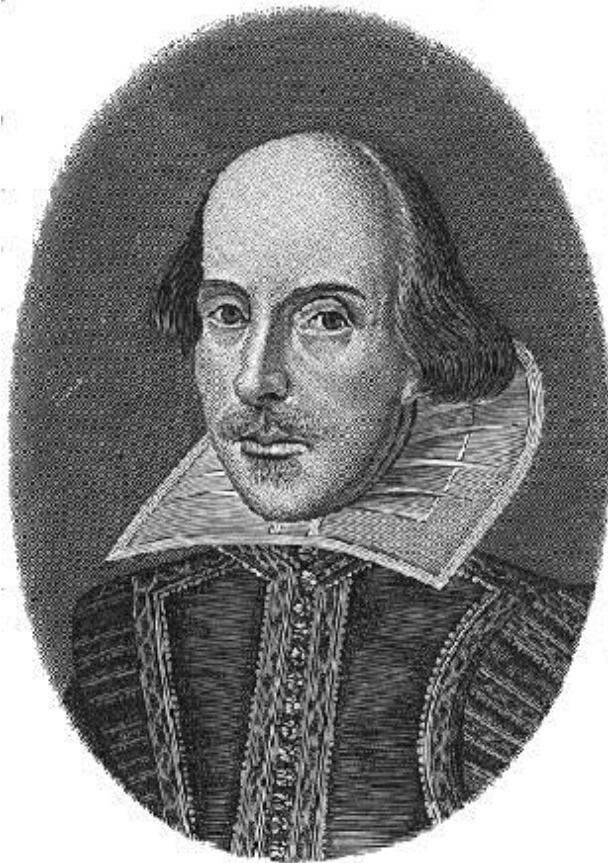


Key Quotations: Parental Tensions Highlighted

I am forbid
To tell the secrets of my prison house,
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young
blood,
Make thy two eyes like stars start from their
spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
And each particular hair to stand on end
Like quills upon the fretful porcupine.
But this eternal blazon must not be
To ears of flesh and blood. List, list, oh, list!
If thou didst ever thy dear father love.
—The Ghost

Come, come, and sit your down; you shall not
budge. You go not till I set you up a glass
Where you may see the inmost part of you.
—Hamlet

Hamlet: Farewell, dear mother.
King Claudius: Thy loving father, Hamlet.
Hamlet: My mother. Father and mother is man
and wife, man and wife is one flesh, and so,
my mother.



"I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not." —W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*