



# Hamlet Essay Kit #10: The Themes of Hamlet (Hamlet Essay Kits)

*Brendan Munnelly*

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You have the rest of your life to appreciate Shakespeare's *Hamlet* - but only a few hours to finish that essay!

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- 3 x 1,500-word full sample essays
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Here are some short samples from the three 1,500-word essays about the themes of Hamlet:

### 1 - INTRODUCTION

Deception, revenge, madness, corruption, death - and all shaped by destiny. No more than dramatic characters can rewrite their playwright's script, Prince Hamlet is not free to "*carve for himself*" (Act I-III) his own life. He comes to recognize "*There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow*" (Act V-II) - and in the fall of princes too. He is "*Hamlet the Dane*" (Act V-II), born a prince but fated to kill a king rather than become one.

### 2 - DECEPTION, UNCERTAINTY AND APPEARANCE VERSUS REALITY: "WHO'S THERE?"

Claudius' poison has so corrupted "*whole ear of Denmark*" (Act I-V) that the natural human relationships of friendship and romantic love are made impossible by mistrust. Both the on-stage characters and we the audience struggle to "*find where truth is hid*" (Act II-II) in a world where appearance and reality are as far apart as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are comically similar.

### 3 - REVENGE: "WHERE IS THY FATHER?"

Three dead fathers leave three different legacies to their sons: a reckless lust for territorial conquest (Young Fortinbras); an overvaluing of social rank and reputation (Laertes); and a soul-damning "*dread command*" (Act III-IV) for vengeful murder (Prince Hamlet). In the end it is not King Hamlet's "*tardy son*" (Act III-IV) nor Polonius' impassioned avenger who triumphs, but Norway's opportunistic adventurer.

### 4 - MADNESS: "TAINT NOT THY MIND"

Is Hamlet ever really mad? Or does the theatrically-minded prince play the role of a madman to avoid actually becoming one? Is what the king calls his "*turbulent and dangerous lunacy*" (Act III-I) a means to help him cling to his sanity? With tragic irony, Hamlet's 'antic disposition' - and the very real rage it both conceals and reveals - is the cause of actual madness in Ophelia.

### 5 - CORRUPTION, DECAY AND DEATH: "AN UNWEEDED GARDEN"

Both Hamlet and Claudius speak of each other in the language of sickness, disease and death that is all-present throughout the play. To Claudius, his nephew is "*like the hectic in my blood*" (Act II-IV). Hamlet calls his uncle a "*canker of our nature*" (Act V-II). The only scene set outside the castle is in a graveyard. The prince's obsessive speaking of corruption and rotteness - "*we eat ourselves for maggots*" (Act IV-III) - reflects his disgust at the falsity of everyone around him.

## 6 - CONCLUSION: “*THE FALL OF A SPARROW*”

Deception unmasked, comeuppance for all, and death everywhere. In the final Act V-II Laertes achieves redemption by exposing Claudius’ plot (“*the king’s to blame*”), and by seeking and receiving Hamlet’s pardon (“*Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet*”). The prince does kill Claudius – but is it in revenge for his father’s murder or his own? And what are the “*Things standing thus unknown*” that Hamlet leaves behind him?

>>> With this book you’ll very quickly be expressing your own thoughts about the play’s interwoven themes, in your own individual way and personal writing style.

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