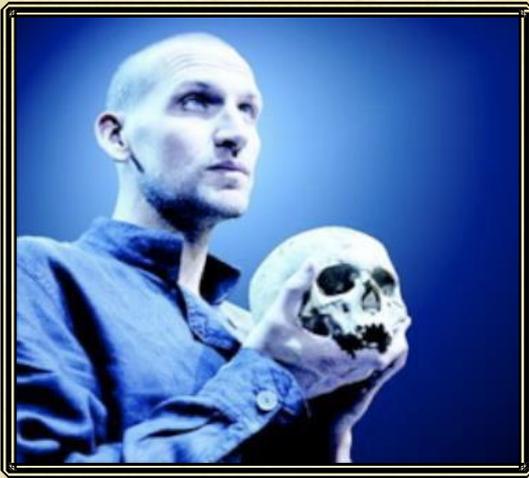


Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

An Introduction

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCVc5TaPpe8&feature=related>



A Brief Introduction to *Hamlet*

- ⌘ Hamlet is a play that has fascinated audiences and readers since it was first written in around 1601-1604
- ⌘ The play centers around Hamlet's decision whether or not to avenge the murder of his father, the King of Denmark. This weight of this decision drives all the other action and relationships in the play.
- ⌘ Hamlet is part of an old tradition of revenge plays, and is based on an old oral legend about Amleth, a prince whose father was killed by his uncle, who then married his mother.
 - ⌘ Amleth pretends to be mad, while plotting how to avenge his father's death, and eventually is able to kill his uncle.

Hamlet Introduction

There's something
rotten in the state
of Denmark . . .



Hamlet Introduction

Prince Hamlet returns home from university to discover that his father is dead and his mother has married his uncle Claudius.



And now Claudius has declared himself king.

Hamlet Introduction

As if that's not bad enough,
the ghost of his father appears
to Hamlet . . .

He tells Hamlet that he's been
murdered by . . .



. . . and demands that Hamlet get revenge.

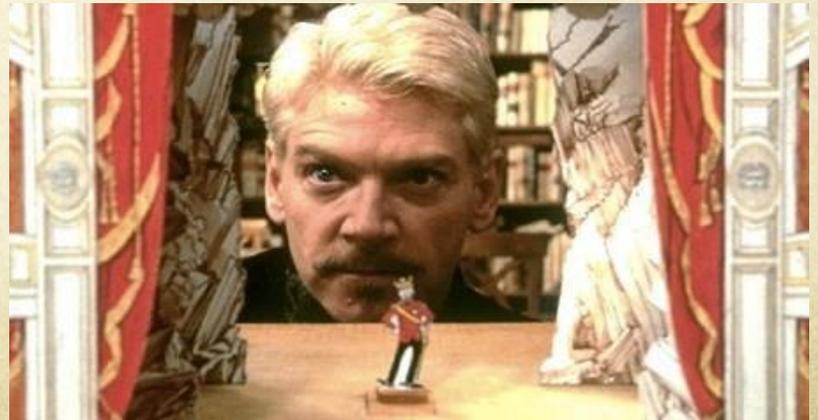
Hamlet Introduction

What should Hamlet do?

Instead of jumping into any action, Hamlet broods over his options—



and then starts acting very strange.



Hamlet Introduction

He starts talking in riddles.

He acts cruelly to Ophelia,
a girl who loves him.



He's suspicious of everyone.

Hamlet Introduction

Why is Hamlet acting like this?

Is he insane? Or faking insanity?

Will he make up his mind to take action?



Should he seek revenge?



Key Thematic Questions in *Hamlet*

⌘ Revenge vs. Justice

⌘ What is the difference between revenge and justice? Is one more moral than the other?

⌘ Is revenge ever an appropriate course of action?

⌘ Action vs. Inaction

⌘ Should one always contemplate (think) before acting?
Explain.

⌘ Fate vs. Autonomy

⌘ Do we have control over the shape of our own lives?

⌘ Or are our roles in life always preordained?

Key Thematic Questions in *Hamlet*

⌘ Madness

⌘ How do we know if someone is crazy?

⌘ Loyalty and Betrayal

⌘ To whom do we owe loyalty?

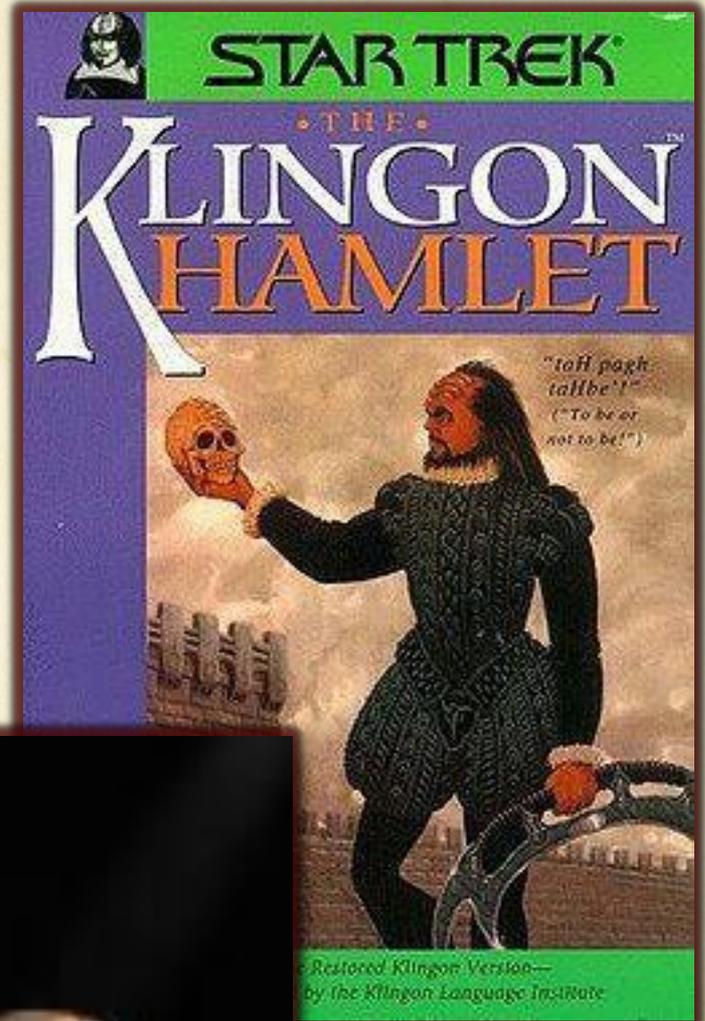
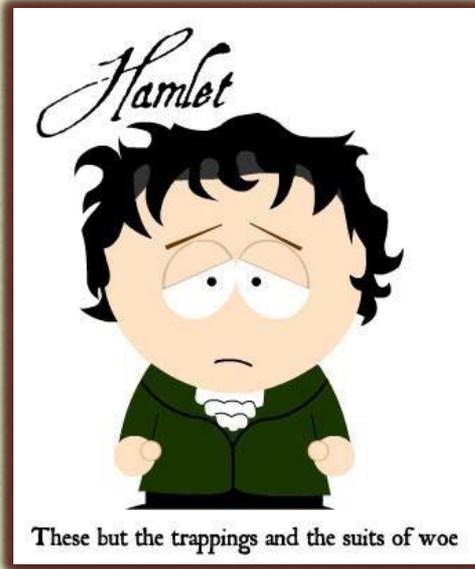
⌘ What happens when loyalties conflict?

⌘ Appearance vs. Reality

⌘ Are ghosts real?

⌘ Socrates believed that arguments properly conducted could lead to a single truth. Do you agree?

Hamlet as Pop Culture



The *Tragedy of Hamlet*

- What matters most at the end of an important tragedy is **not success or failure, but what a man is.**
- Tragedy moves into the realm of **the human spirit** and **at the end we contemplate the nature of man.**

Setting

- We might set the time of the play *Hamlet* as 1050.
- Kronborg Castle in Elsinore
- The castle still stands and Shakespeare's play has made it world-famous
- In fact, *Hamlet* is played in its courtyard occasionally.

Kronborg Castle



Themes and Subtexts of the play

- plight of women as victims of the machinations of a male-dominated society
- definition of madness
- revenge
- the inability to love
- rational and natural explanations vs. metaphysical ones - reality beyond what is perceptible to the senses