
THE MAIN CONFLICT IN SHAKESPEARE'S "HAMLET" AND ITS LITERARY ANALYSIS

Jalolova Lobarkhon Sunnatullo kizi

Student of Navoi state pedagogical institute

jalolovalobarxon@gmail.com

+998913376473

ANNOTATION

The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, often shortened to Hamlet, is a tragedy written by William Shakespeare sometime between 1599 and 1601. It is Shakespeare's longest play, with 29,551 words. Set in Denmark, the play depicts Prince Hamlet and his attempts to exact revenge against his uncle, Claudius, who has murdered Hamlet's father in order to seize his throne and marry Hamlet's mother.

Hamlet is considered among the "most powerful and influential tragedies in the English language", with a story capable of "seemingly endless retelling and adaptation by others".

INTRODUCTION

There are many works that have been pointed to as possible sources for Shakespeare's play—from ancient Greek tragedies to Elizabethan plays. The editors of the Arden Shakespeare question the idea of "source hunting", pointing out that it presupposes that authors always require ideas from other works for their own, and suggests that no author can have an original idea or be an originator. When Shakespeare wrote, there were many stories about sons avenging the murder of their fathers, and many about clever avenging sons pretending to be foolish in order to outsmart their foes. This would include the story of the ancient Roman, Lucius Junius Brutus, which Shakespeare apparently knew, as well as the story of Amleth, which was preserved in Latin by 13th-century chronicler Saxo Grammaticus in his *Gesta Danorum*, and printed in Paris in 1514. The Amleth story was subsequently adapted and then published in French in 1570 by the 16th-century scholar François de Belleforest. It has a number of plot elements and major characters in common with Shakespeare's Hamlet, and lacks others that are found in Shakespeare

William Shakespeare's life and his well-known works

William Shakespeare (bapt. 26 April 1564 – 23 April 1616) was an English playwright, poet and actor. He is regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist.[3][4][5] He is often called England's national poet and the "Bard of Avon" (or simply "the Bard").[6][c] His extant works, including collaborations, consist of some 39 plays, 154 sonnets, three long narrative poems, and a few other verses, some of uncertain authorship. His plays have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright.[8] He remains arguably the most influential writer in the English language, and his works continue to be studied and reinterpreted.

Shakespeare was born and raised in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire. At the age of 18, he married Anne Hathaway, with whom he had three children: Susanna, and twins Hamnet and Judith. Sometime between 1585 and 1592, he began a successful career in London as an actor, writer, and part-owner of a playing company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, later known as the King's Men. At age 49 (around 1613), he appears to have retired to Stratford, where he died three years later. Few records of Shakespeare's private life survive; this has stimulated considerable speculation about such matters as his physical appearance, his sexuality, his religious beliefs and whether the works attributed to him were written by others.

Shakespeare produced most of his known works between 1589 and 1613.[12][13] His early plays were primarily comedies and histories and are regarded as some of the best works produced in these genres. He then wrote mainly tragedies until 1608, among them *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, all considered to be among the finest works in the English language. In the last phase of his life, he wrote tragicomedies (also known as romances) and collaborated with other playwrights.

Many of Shakespeare's plays were published in editions of varying quality and accuracy in his lifetime. However, in 1623, John Heminges and Henry Condell, two fellow actors and friends of Shakespeare's, published a more definitive text known as the First Folio, a posthumous collected edition of Shakespeare's dramatic works that included 36 of his plays. Its Preface was a prescient poem by Ben Jonson, a former rival of Shakespeare, that hailed Shakespeare with the now famous epithet: "not of an age, but for all time".

Shakespeare was the son of John Shakespeare, an alderman and a successful glover (glove-maker) originally from Snitterfield in Warwickshire, and Mary Arden, the daughter of an affluent landowning family. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, where he was baptised on 26 April 1564. His date of birth is unknown, but is traditionally observed on 23 April, Saint George's Day. This date, which can be traced to William Oldys and George Steevens, has proved appealing to biographers because Shakespeare died on the same date in 1616. He was the third of eight children, and the eldest surviving son.

Although no attendance records for the period survive, most biographers agree that Shakespeare was probably educated at the King's New School in Stratford, a free school chartered in 1553, about a quarter-mile (400 m) from his home. Grammar schools varied in quality during the Elizabethan era, but grammar school curricula were largely similar: the basic Latin text was standardised by royal decree,[23][24] and the school would have provided an intensive education in grammar based upon Latin classical authors.

At the age of 18, Shakespeare married 26-year-old Anne Hathaway. The consistory court of the Diocese of Worcester issued a marriage licence on 27 November 1582. The next day, two of Hathaway's neighbours posted bonds guaranteeing that no lawful claims impeded the marriage.[26] The ceremony may have been arranged in some haste since the Worcester chancellor allowed the marriage banns to be read once instead of the usual three times, and six months after the marriage

Anne gave birth to a daughter, Susanna, baptised 26 May 1583. Twins, son Hamnet and daughter Judith, followed almost two years later and were baptised 2 February 1585. Hamnet died of unknown causes at the age of 11 and was buried 11 August 1596.

After the birth of the twins, Shakespeare left few historical traces until he is mentioned as part of the London theatre scene in 1592. The exception is the appearance of his name in the "complaints bill" of a law case before the Queen's Bench court at Westminster dated Michaelmas Term 1588 and 9 October 1589. Scholars refer to the years between 1585 and 1592 as Shakespeare's "lost years". Biographers attempting to account for this period have reported many apocryphal stories. Nicholas Rowe, Shakespeare's first biographer, recounted a Stratford legend that Shakespeare fled the town for London to escape prosecution for deer poaching in the estate of local squire Thomas Lucy. Shakespeare is also supposed to have taken his revenge on Lucy by writing a scurrilous ballad about him. Another 18th-century story has Shakespeare starting his theatrical career minding the horses of theatre patrons in London. John Aubrey reported that Shakespeare had been a country schoolmaster. Some 20th-century scholars suggested that Shakespeare may have been employed as a schoolmaster by Alexander Hoghton of Lancashire, a Catholic landowner who named a certain "William Shakeshafte" in his will. Little evidence substantiates such stories other than hearsay collected after his death, and Shakeshafte was a common name in the Lancashire area.

Shakespeare's literary and social aspirations are revealed at every turn. In his Petrarchism, for example, he adopts a mode that had become a staple of courtly discourse. Elizabethan politicians figured themselves and their personal and political conditions in Petrarchan terms. The inescapable and enduring frustrations of the courtier's life were habitually figured via the analogy of the frustrated, confused, but devoted Petrarchan lover. Yet Shakespeare's approach to this convention typifies the 1590s younger generation's sense of its incongruity. Lines such as "the love-sick queen began to sweat" are understandably rare in Elizabethan courtly discourse. Power relations expressed through the gendered language of [Elizabeth's](#) eroticized politics are reversed: "Her eyes petitioners to his eyes suing / ... Her eyes wooed still, his eyes disdain'd the wooing." It is Venus who deploys the conventional *carpe diem* arguments: "Make use of time / ... Fair flowers that are not gath' red in their prime, / Rot, and consume themselves in little time"; she even provides a *blason* of her own charms: "Thou canst not see one wrinkle in my brow, / Mine eyes are grey, and bright, and quick in turning."

Like most Elizabethan treatments of love, Shakespeare's work is characterized by paradox ("She's love, she loves, and yet she is not lov'd"), by narrative and thematic diversity, and by attempts to render the inner workings of the mind, exploring the psychology of perception ("Oft the eye mistakes, the brain being troubled"). The poem addresses such artistic preoccupations of the 1590s as the relation of poetry to painting and the possibility of literary immortality, as well as social concerns such as the phenomenon of "masterless women," and the (to men) alarming and unknowable forces unleashed by female desire, an issue that for a host of reasons fascinated Elizabeth's subjects. Indeed, *Venus and Adonis* flirts with taboos, as do other successful works of the 1590s, offering readers living in a paranoid, plague-ridden city a fantasy of passionate and fatal physical desire, with Venus leading Adonis "prisoner in a red-rose chain." In its day it was appreciated as an erotic fantasy

glorying in the inversion of established categories and values, with a veneer of learning and the snob appeal of association with a celebrated aristocrat.

Since the Romantic period the frank sexuality of Shakespeare's *Venus* has held less appeal for literary critics and scholars than it had to Elizabethan and Jacobean readers. C.S. Lewis concludes in *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (1954) that "if the poem is not meant to arouse disgust it was very foolishly written." In more recent years a combination of feminism, cultural studies, renewed interest in rhetoric, and a return to traditional archival research has begun to reclaim *Venus and Adonis* from such prejudice.

The elevated subject of Shakespeare's next publication, *Lucrece*, suggests that *Venus and Adonis* had been well received, *Lucrece* comprises 1,855 lines, in 265 stanzas. The stanza (as in *Complaint of Rosamund*) is the seven-line rhyme royal (*ababbcc*) immortalized in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (circa 1385) and thereafter considered especially appropriate for tragedy, complaint, and philosophical reflection. In places the narrator explicitly highlights the various rhetorical set pieces ("Here she exclaims against repose and rest"). *Lucrece* herself comments on her performance after the apostrophes to "comfort-killing Night, image of Hell," Opportunity, and Time. Elizabethan readers would have appreciated much about the poem, from its plentiful wordplay ("to shun the blot, she would not blot the letter"; "Ere she with blood had stain'd her stain'd excuse") and verbal dexterity, to the inner debate raging inside Tarquin. Though an exemplary tyrant from ancient history, he also exemplifies the conventional 1590s conflict between willful youthful prodigality and sententious experience ("My part is youth, and beats these from the stage"). The arguments in his "disputation / 'Tween frozen conscience and hot burning will" are those of the Petrarchan lover: "nothing can affection's course control," and "Yet strive I to embrace mine infamy." But the context of this rhetorical performance is crucial throughout. Unlike *Venus and Adonis*, *Lucrece* is not set in a mythical golden age, but in a fallen, violent world. This is particularly apparent in the rhetorical and ultimately physical competition of their debate--contrasting Tarquin's speeches with *Lucrece's* eloquent appeals to his better nature.

The combination of ancient and contemporary strengthens the political elements in the poem. It demonstrates tyranny in its most intimate form, committing a private outrage that is inescapably public; hence the rape is figured in terms both domestic (as a burglary) and public (as a hunt, a war, a siege). It also reveals the essential violence of many conventional erotic metaphors. Shakespeare draws on the powerful Elizabethan myth of the island nation as a woman: although Tarquin is a Roman, an insider, his journey from the siege of Ardea to *Lucrece's* chamber connects the two assaults. His attack figures a society at war with itself, and he himself is shown to be self-divided." Tyranny, lust, and greed translate the metaphors of Petrarchism into the actuality of rape, which is figured by *gradatio*, or climax: "What could he see but mightily he noted? / What did he note but strongly he desired?"

The historically validated interpretation—for Shakespeare's readers, descendants of Brutus in New Troy—is figured by Brutus, who "pluck'd the knife from *Lucrece's* side." He steps forward, casting off his reputation for folly and improvising a ritual (involving kissing the knife) that transforms grief

and outrage at Lucrece's death into a determination to "publish Tarquin's foul offense" and change the political system. Brutus emerges from the shadows, reminding the reader that the poem, notwithstanding its powerful speeches and harrowing images, is also remarkable for what is unshown, untold, implicit. Until recently few commentators have taken up the interpretative challenge posed by Brutus. Traditionally *Lucrece* has been dismissed as a bookish, pedantic dry run for Shakespeare's tragedies, in [William Empson](#)'s phrase, "the Bard doing five-finger exercises," containing what F.T. Prince in his 1960 edition of the poems dismisses as defective rhetoric in the treatment of an uninteresting story. Many critics have sought to define the poem's genre, which combines political fable, female complaint, and tragedy within a milieu of self-conscious antiquity. But perhaps the most significant recent developments have been the feminist treatments of the poem, the reawakening interest in rhetoric, and a dawning awareness of the work's political engagement. *Lucrece*, like so many of Shakespeare's historical tragedies, problematizes the categories of history and myth, of public and private, and exemplifies the bewildering nature of historical parallels. The self-conscious rhetorical display and the examination of representation is daringly politicized, explicitly, if inconclusively, connecting the aesthetic and the erotic with politics both sexual and state. At the time of its publication, *Lucrece* was Shakespeare's most profound meditation on history, particularly on the relations between public role and private morality and on the conjunction of forces—personal, political, social—that creates turning points in human history. In it he indirectly articulates the concerns of his generation and also, perhaps, of his young patron, who was already closely associated with the doomed earl of Essex.

In 1598 or 1599 the printer William Jaggard brought out an anthology of 20 miscellaneous poems, which he eventually attributed to Shakespeare, though the authorship of all 20 is still disputed. At least five are demonstrably Shakespearean. Poem 1 is a version of Sonnet 138 ("When My Love Swears that She Is Made of Truth"), poem 2 of Sonnet 144 ("Two Loves I Have, of Comfort and Despair"), and the rest are sonnets that appear in act 4 of *Love's Labor's Lost* (1598). Investigation of Jaggard's volume, called *The Passionate Pilgrime*, has yielded and will continue to yield insight into such matters as the relationship of manuscript to print culture in the 1590s, the changing nature of the literary profession, and the evolving status of the author. It may also, as with *The Phoenix and Turtle* (1601), lead to increased knowledge of the chronology and circumstances of Shakespeare's literary career, as well as affording some glimpses of his revisions of his texts.

"With this key / Shakespeare unlocked his heart," wrote [William Wordsworth](#) in "[Scorn not the Sonnet](#)" (1827) of the *Sonnets*. "If so," replied [Robert Browning](#) in his poem "House" (1876), "the less Shakespeare he." None of Shakespeare's works has been so tirelessly ransacked for biographical clues as the 154 sonnets, published with *A Lover's Complaint* by Thomas Thorpe in 1609. Unlike the narrative poems, they enjoyed only limited commercial success during Shakespeare's lifetime, and no further edition appeared until Benson's in 1640. The title page, like Jaggard's of *The Passionate Pilgrim*, relies upon the drawing power of the author's name and promises "SHAKE-SPEARES / SONNETS / Never before Imprinted."

The 154 sonnets are conventionally divided between the "young man" sonnets (1-126) and the "dark lady" sonnets (127-152), with the final pair often seen as an envoy or coda to the collection. There is

no evidence that such a division has chronological implications, though the volume is usually read in such a way. Shakespeare employs the conventional English sonnet form: three quatrains capped with a couplet. Drama is conjured within individual poems, as the speaker wrestles with some problem or situation; it is generated by the juxtaposition of poems, with instant switches of tone, mood, and style; it is implied by cross-references and interrelationships within the sequence as a whole.

There remains a question, however, of how closely Shakespeare was involved in preparing the text of the sonnets for publication. Some commentators have advocated skepticism about all attempts to recover Shakespeare's intention. Others have looked more closely at Thorpe, at Benson, and at the circulation of Shakespeare's verse in the manuscript culture: these investigations have led to a reexamination of the ideas of authorship and authority in the period. Although scholarly opinion is still divided, several influential studies and editions in recent years have argued, on a variety of grounds, for the authority, integrity, and coherence of Thorpe's text, an integrity now regarded as including *A Lover's Complaint*.

The subsequent history of the text of the sonnets is inseparable from the history of Shakespeare's reputation. John Benson's *Poems: Written by Wil. Shake-speare. Gent* (1640) was part of an attempt to "canonize" Shakespeare, collecting verses into a handsome quarto that could be sold as a companion to the dramatic folio texts ("to be serviceable for the continuance of glory to the deserved author in these his poems"). Benson dropped a few sonnets, added other poems, provided titles for individual pieces, changed Thorpe's order, conflated sonnets, and modified some of the male pronouns, thereby making the sequence seem more unambiguously heterosexual in its orientation. In recent years there has been increasing study of Benson's edition as a distinct literary production in its own right.

The Romantic compulsion to read the sonnets as autobiography inspired attempts to rearrange them to tell their story more clearly. It also led to attempts to relate them to what was known or could be surmised about Shakespeare's life. Some commentators speculated that the publication of the sonnets was the result of a conspiracy by Shakespeare's rivals or enemies, seeking to embarrass him by publishing love poems apparently addressed to a man rather than to the conventional sonnet-mistress. The five appendices to Hyder Edward Rollins's Variorum edition document the first century of such endeavors. Attention was directed toward "problems" such as the identity of Master W. H., of the young man, of the rival poet, and of the dark lady (a phrase, incidentally, never used by Shakespeare in the sonnets). The disappearance of the sonnets from the canon coincided with the time when Shakespeare's standing as the nation's bard was being established. The critics' current fascination is just as significant for what it reveals about contemporary culture, as the "Shakespeare myth" comes under attack from various directions.

The sonnets were apparently composed during a period of ten or a dozen years starting in about 1592-1593. In *Palladis Tamia* Meres refers to the existence of "sugared sonnets" circulating among Shakespeare's "private friends," some which were published in *The Passionate Pilgrim*. The fact of prior circulation has important implications for the sonnets. The particular poems that were in circulation suggest that the general shape and themes of the *Sonnets* were established from the earliest

stages. Evidence suggesting a lengthy period of composition is inconvenient for commentators seeking to unlock the autobiographical secret of the sonnets. An early date (1592-1594) argues for Southampton as the boy and [Christopher Marlowe](#) as the rival poet; a date a decade later brings [George Herbert](#) and [George Chapman](#) into the frame. There are likewise early dark ladies (Lucy Negro, before she took charge of a brothel) and late (Emilia Lanier, Mary Fitton). There may, of course, have been more than one young man, rival, and dark lady, or in fact the sequence may not be autobiographical at all.

No Elizabethan sonnet sequence presents an unambiguous linear narrative, a novel in verse. Shakespeare's is no exception. Yet neither are the *Sonnets* a random anthology, a loose gathering of scattered rhymes. While groups of sonnets are obviously linked thematically, such as the opening sequence urging the young man to marry (1-17), and the dark lady sequence (127-152), the ordering within those groups is not that of continuous narrative. There are many smaller units, with poems recording that the friend has become the lover of the poet's mistress (40-42), or expressing jealousy of the young man's friendship with a rival poet (78-86). Sonnet 44 ends with a reference to two of the four elements "so much of earth and water wrought," and 45 starts with "The other two, slight air and purging fire." Similarly indivisible are the two "horse" sonnets 50 and 51, the "Will" sonnets 135 and 136, and 67 and 68. Sonnets 20 and 87 are connected as much by their telling use of feminine rhyme as by shared themes. Dispersed among the poems are pairs and groups that amplify or comment on each other, such as those dealing with absence (43-45, 47-48, 50-52, and 97-98).

"My name is Will," declares the speaker of 136. Sonnet 145 apparently puns on Anne Hathaway's name ("I hate, from hate away she threw"). Elizabethan sonneteers, following [Sir Philip Sidney](#), conventionally teased their readers with hints of an actuality behind the poems. Sidney had given Astrophil his own coat of arms, had quibbled with the married name of the supposed original for Stella (Penelope Rich) and with the Greek etymology of his own name (Philip, "lover of horses") in *Astrophil and Stella* sonnets 41, 49, and 53. Shakespeare's speaker descends as much from Astrophil as from Daniel's more enigmatic persona, most obviously in the deployment of the multiple sense of *will* in 135 and 136. Yet Shakespeare's sequence is unusual in including sexual consummation (Spenser's *Amoretti* led to the celebration of marriage in *Epithalamion*, 1595) and unique in its persuasion to marry. There is evidence that some contemporary readers were disturbed by the transgressive and experimental features of 1590s erotic writing. Works by Marston and Marlowe were among those banned in 1599 along with satires and other more conventional kindling. Benson's much-discussed modification of the text of the *Sonnets* indicates at least a certain level of anxiety about the gender of the characters in the poems. Benson retained Sonnet 20 but dropped 126 ("O Thou My Lovely Boy") and changed the direct address of 108 ("Nothing, Sweet Boy") to the neutral "Nothing, Sweet Love."

The speaker sums up his predicament in 144, one of the *Passionate Pilgrim* poems:

The speaker's attraction to the "worser spirit" is figured in harsh language throughout the sequence: in fact, the brutal juxtaposition of lyricism and lust is characteristic of the collection as a whole. The

consequent disjointedness expresses a form of psychological verisimilitude by the standards of Shakespeare's day, where discontinuity and repetition were held to reveal the inner state of a speaker.

The anachronism of applying modern attitudes toward homosexuality to early modern culture is self-evident. Where Shakespeare and his contemporaries drew their boundaries cannot be fully determined, but they were fascinated by the Platonic concept of androgyny, a concept drawn on by the queen herself almost from the moment of her accession. Sonnet 53 is addressed to an inexpressible lover, who resembles both Adonis and Helen. Androgyny is only part of the exploration of sexuality in the sonnets, however. A humanist education could open windows onto a world very different from post-Reformation England. Plato's praise of love between men was in marked contrast to the establishment of capital punishment as the prescribed penalty for sodomy in 1533.

In the *Sonnets* the relationship between the speaker and the young man both invites and resists definition, and it is clearly presented as a challenge to orthodoxy. If at times it seems to correspond to the many Elizabethan celebrations of male friendship, at others it has a raw physicality that resists such polite categorization. Even in sonnet 20, where sexual intimacy seems to be explicitly denied, the speaker's mind runs to bawdy puns. The speaker refers to the friend as "rose," "my love," "lover," and "sweet love," and many commentators have demonstrated the repeated use of explicitly sexual language to the male friend (in 106, 109, and 110, for example). On the other hand, the acceptance of the traditional distinction between the young man and the dark lady sonnets obscures the fact that Shakespeare seems deliberately to render the gender of his subject uncertain in the vast majority of cases.

For some commentators the sequence also participates in the so-called birth of the author, a crucial feature of early modern writing: the liberation of the writer from the shackles of patronage. In Joel Fineman's analysis, Shakespeare creates a radical internalization of Petrarchism, reordering its dynamic by directing his attention to the speaker's subjectivity rather than to the ostensible object of the speaker's devotion: the poetry of praise becomes poetry of self-discovery.

Sidney's *Astrophil* had inhabited a world of court intrigue, chivalry, and international politics, exemplifying the overlap between political and erotic discourse in Elizabethan England. The circumstances of Shakespeare's speaker, in contrast, are not those of a courtier but of a male of the upwardly mobile "middling sort." Especially in the young man sonnets, there is a marked class anxiety, as the speaker seeks to define his role, whether as a friend, a tutor, a counselor, an employee, or a sexual rival. Not only are comparisons drawn from the world of the professional theater ("As an unperfect actor on the stage" in sonnet 23), but also from the world of business: compared to the prodigal "Unthrifty loveliness" of the youth (sonnet 4), "Making a famine where abundance lies" (1), the speaker inhabits a bourgeois world of debts, loans, repayment, and usury, speaking in similar language to the Dark Lady: "I myself am mortgaged to thy will" (134).

Yet Shakespeare's linguistic performance extends beyond the "middling sort." He was a great popularizer, translating court art and high art—John Lyly, Sidney, [Edmund Spenser](#)—into palatable and sentimental commercial forms. His sequence is remarkable for its thematic and verbal richness,

for its extraordinary range of nuances and ambiguities. He often employs words in multiple senses (as in the seemingly willfully indecipherable resonance, punning, polysemy, implication, and nuance of sonnet 94). Shakespeare's celebrated verbal playfulness, the polysemy of his language, is a function of publication, whether by circulation or printing. His words acquire currency beyond himself and become the subject of reading and interpretation.

This linguistic richness can also be seen as an act of social aspiration: as the appropriation of the ambiguity axiomatically inherent in courtly speech. The sequence continues the process of dismantling traditional distinctions among rhetoric, philosophy, and poetry begun in the poems of 1593-1594. The poems had dealt in reversal and inversion and had combined elements of narrative and drama. The *Sonnets* occupy a distinct, marginal space between social classes, between public and private, narrative and dramatic, and they proceed not through inverting categories but rather through interrogating them. Variations are played on Elizabethan conventions of erotic discourse: love without sex, sex without love, a "master-mistress" who is "prick'd ... out for women's pleasure" as the ultimate in unattainable ("to my purpose nothing," 20) adoration. Like Spenser's *Amoretti*, Shakespeare's collection meditates on the relationships among love, art, time, and immortality. It remains a meditation, however, even when it seems most decided.

The consequences of love, the pain of rejection, desertion, and loss of reputation are powerful elements in the poem that follows the sequence. Despite Thorpe's unambiguous attribution of the piece to Shakespeare, *A Lover's Complaint* was rejected from the canon, on distinctly flimsy grounds, until quite recently. It has been much investigated to establish its authenticity and its date. It is now generally accepted as Shakespearean and dated at some point between 1600 and 1609, possibly revised from a 1600 first version for publication in Thorpe's volume. The poem comprises 329 lines, disposed into 47 seven-line rhyme-royal stanzas. It draws heavily on Spenser and Daniel and is the complaint of a wronged woman about the duplicity of a man. It is in some sense a companion to *Lucrece* and to *All's Well That Ends Well* (circa 1602-1603) as much as to the sonnets. Its connections with the narrative poems, with the plays, and with the genre of female complaint have been thoroughly explored. The woman is a city besieged by an eloquent wooer ("how deceits were gilded in his smiling"), whose essence is dissimulation ("his passion, but an art of craft"). There has been a growing tendency to relate the poem to its immediate context in Thorpe's *Sonnets* volume and to find it a reflection or gloss or critique of the preceding sequence.

Interest in Shakespeare's nondramatic writings has increased markedly in recent years. They are no longer so easily marginalized or dismissed as conventional, and they contribute in powerful ways to a deeper understanding of Shakespeare's oeuvre and the Elizabethan era in which he lived and wrote.

CONCLUSION

In telling the story of a fatally indecisive character's inability to choose the proper course to avenge his father's death, Hamlet explores questions of fate versus free will, whether it is better to act decisively or let nature take its course, and ultimately if anything we do in our time on earth makes any difference. Once he learns his uncle has killed his father, Hamlet feels duty-bound to take decisive

action, but he has so many doubts about his situation and even about his own feelings that he cannot decide what action to take. The conflict that drives the plot of Hamlet is almost entirely internal: Hamlet wrestles with his own doubt and uncertainty in search of something he believes strongly enough to act on. The play's events are side-effects of this internal struggle. Hamlet's attempts to gather more evidence of Claudius's guilt alert Claudius to Hamlet's suspicions, and as Hamlet's internal struggle deepens, he begins to act impulsively out of frustration, eventually murdering Polonius by mistake. The conflict of Hamlet is never resolved: Hamlet cannot finally decide what to believe or what action to take. This lack of resolution makes the ending of Hamlet especially horrifying: nearly all the characters are dead, but nothing has been solved. Four-fifths of Caxton's works were published in English. He worked as an English translator for many years. He did a lot of the translation and editing himself. Caxton is said to have printed 108 books, 87 of which were different titles. 26 of the titles were also translated by Caxton. His main guiding principle in translating was an honest desire to provide the most linguistically exact translation of foreign language texts into English, but his rushed publishing schedule and lack of translation skill frequently resulted in wholesale translation of French words into English and numerous misunderstandings. However, the English language was changing rapidly in Caxton's time and the works he was given to print were in a variety of styles and dialects. Caxton was a technician rather than a writer and he often faced dilemmas concerning language standardization in the books he printed. He wrote about this subject in the preface to his *Eneydos*. His successor Wynkyn de Worde faced similar problems. In the year before his death he complained in the preface to his *Eneydos* of the changing state of the English language, a condition of things which he did as much as any man to remedy. He printed Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, *Troilus and Creseide*, the *House of Fame*, and the translation of Boethius; Gower's Confessio Amantis, and many poems of Lydgate. Caxton is credited with standardising the English language through printing. This facilitated the expansion of English vocabulary, the development of inflection and syntax and the ever-widening gap between the spoken and the written word.

The play's climax arrives when Hamlet stages a play to "catch the conscience of the king" (II.ii.) and get conclusive evidence of Claudius's guilt. By now, however, Hamlet seems to have truly gone mad. His own behavior at the play is so provocative that when Claudius does respond badly to the play it's unclear whether he feels guilty about his crime or angry with Hamlet. As Claudius tries to pray, Hamlet has yet another chance to take his revenge, and we learn that Hamlet's apparent madness has not ended his internal struggle over what to do: he decides not to kill Claudius for now, this time because of the risk that Claudius will go to heaven if he dies while praying. Hamlet accuses Gertrude of being involved in his father's death, but he's acting so erratically that Gertrude thinks her son is simply "mad [...] as the sea and wind/When they each contend which is the mightier" (III.iv). Again, the audience cannot know whether Gertrude says these lines as a cover for her own guilt, or because she genuinely has no idea what Hamlet is talking about, and thinks her son is losing his mind. Acting impulsively or madly, Hamlet mistakes Polonius for Claudius and kills him.

The play's falling action deals with the consequences of Polonius's death. Hamlet is sent away, Ophelia goes mad and Laertes returns from France to avenge his father's death. When Hamlet comes back to Elsinore, he no longer seems to be concerned with revenge, which he hardly mentions after

this point in the play. His internal struggle is not over, however. Now Hamlet contemplates death, but he is unable to come to any conclusion about the meaning or purpose of death, or to resign himself to his own death. He is, however, less squeamish about killing innocent people, and reports to Horatio how he signed the death warrants of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to save his own life. Claudius and Laertes plot to kill Hamlet, but the plot goes awry. Gertrude is poisoned by mistake, Laertes and Hamlet are both poisoned, and as he dies Hamlet finally murders Claudius. Taking his revenge does not end Hamlet's internal struggle. He still has lots to say: "If I had time [...] O I could tell you— / But let it be" (V.ii.) and he asks Horatio to tell his story when he is dead. In the final moments of the play the new king, Fortinbras, agrees with this request: "Let us haste to hear it" (V.ii.). Hamlet's life is over, but the struggle to decide the truth about Hamlet and his life is not

THE LIST OF USED LITERATURE

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