# A STRUCTURAL TECHNIQUE: The effect of juxtapositions (doubling) in the *Hamlet*

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| **HAMLET**     | • All three characters are young men motivated to revenge the murder of their father  
• Hamlet is asked by the Ghost to avenge his murder by Claudius, yet is indecisive. He is only able to avenge his father at the end of the play, and is mortally wounded himself.  
• Laertes wants to avenge the murder of his father, Polonius, by Hamlet. He is a typical “hot-blooded” revenge tragedy hero.  
• Young Fontinbras, wants to avenge the murder of his father and loss of family lands to King Hamlet. Initially he wishes to invade Denmark, but is prevented from doing this by his uncle, Norway.  
• At the end of the play, Young Fontinbras is the most successful as not only does he regain his lost family lands but also becomes King of Denmark. | Hamlet - **ANTITHESIS**  
“Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell” (1.4.42)  
“To be or not to be, that is thy question” (3.1.55)  
Laertes – **MORE DIRECT/ ANGRY TONE**  
“Oh thou vile king. Give me my father!”  
“That drop of blood that’s calm proclaims me bastard” (4.5.116-8) | **Revenge** – what is Shakespeare saying? 3 characters are juxtaposed against each other. Revenge is a base emotion that corrupts characters and ultimately leads to their demise. This is evidenced in the characters of Hamlet and Laertes. Hamlet’s indecision and inaction regarding the murder of his father, allows corruption and decay to spread throughout Denmark. Laertess allows revenge to drive him towards treachery against Hamlet in their duel, leading to his death. Only Young Fontinbras survives as he does not revenge drive him into impulsive action or inaction through too much thought and contemplation. |
| **LAERTES**    |                                |                                     |                                                                                |
| **YOUNG FONTINBRAS** |                                |                                     |                                                                                |
| **HAMLET**     | • Both characters display madness in response to the death of a father, and speak in prose.  
• Hamlet feigns an “antic disposition” that is part of a plot to determine whether Claudius is really guilty of his father’s murder. Yet he also experiences the extreme melancholy of a malcontent whose indecision and contemplation of whether life is really worth living, hampers him.  
• Ophelia responds to the murder of her father by her once boyfriend, by becoming mad. | • Hamlet’s madness is at times deliberately targeted, he likens Rosencrantz and Guildernstern’s attempts to question him as playing him like a pipe: IMAGERY  
“You would play upon me, you would seem to know my stops…you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass…do you think I am easier to play then a pipe” (3.2.330-4)  
• Ophelia’s madness has no target, but is indiscriminately inappropriate as she signs bawdy songs and speaks in nonsense.  
“Young men will do’t if they come to’t – By cock they are to blame” (4.5.60-1) | Madness displayed by both Hamlet and Ophelia is evidence of the decay and corruption permeating the Danish Royal Court. Shakespeare employs these 2 characters to represent just how far the corruption in the court has spread, when the heir to the throne acts mad and a young woman becomes hysterical in response to the murder of her father. The character of Hamlet is important in this, as the madness he employs in public is directed at uncovering Claudius’s guilt but he also displays madness in his soliloquies as he contemplates |
| **OPHELIA**    |                                |                                     |                                                                                |
| **HAMLET**     |                                |                                     |                                                                                |
| **OPHELIA**    |                                |                                     |                                                                                |
whether life is really worth living.

**CLAUDIUS**
**KING HAMLET**

• King Hamlet divinely ordained king
• Claudius, his brother who murdered him to gain the throne.

• King Hamlet is described using imagery drawn from the classical world giving him god-like qualities.
  “See what a grace was seated on this brow:; Hyperion’s curls, the front of Jove himself, A combination and a form indeed… …What every god did seem to set his seal To give the world assurance of a man. This was your husband.” (3.4.55-63)
• Claudius – DISEASE/IMAGERY
  Here is your husband, like a mildewed ear Blasting his wholesome brother” (3.4. 64-5)

Shakespeare is commenting on the idea of a divinely ordained king as represented in the classical imagery he uses to describe King Hamlet. He shows how the state is disrupted when the throne is usurped through murder, and Claudius becomes king. As Claudius gained the kingdom through corrupt means so the nation became corrupt.

**KING HAMLET**
**PRINCE HAMLET**

• King Hamlet is a warrior king able to defeat an enemy in single combat eg. old Fontibras
• Prince Hamlet is a university student who writes poetry and is often seen reading books.

• Horatio:
  “…our valiant Hamlet/ …Did slay this Fontinbras” (1.1.84-6)
• Getrude to Prince Hamlet:
  “I pray thee stay with us, go not to Wittenberg” (1.2.119) Wittenberg is the location of a university in Denmark.

Shakespeare demonstrates the extent of Hamlet’s inaction and indecisiveness, by comparing him to his father, King Hamlet, who is a warrior.

**OSRIC**
**POLONIUS**

• Osric adopts the role of Polonius in Act 5, that of a pompous, self-important royal counsellor/ servant.
• Both use language that is over-wrought, indirect and pretentious
• Shakespeare portrays both men as comic fools that the young Prince Hamlet enjoys mocking.

• Polonius: careful use of repetition and structure in this passage to create a sense of foolish comedy.
  Madam, I swear no use no art at all.
  That he is mad, ‘tis true, ‘tis pity
And pity ‘tis true – a foolish figure,
But farewell it, for I will use no art.
(2.2.96-99)

Role of Polonius/ Osric both act as royal counsellors who help arrange the unfolding action in the play. Yet their speech is often indirect and given to unnecessary word play. Hamlet enjoys mocking these characters which in turn makes his character more appealing to the audience.

**GERTRUDE**
**OPHELIA**

• Both Gertrude and Ophelia are close female confidantes of Hamlet, who are used against him by Polonius and Claudius who eavesdrop to find the source of the young prince’s madness.
• However, Gertrude changes her allegiances and keeps her son’s secret, while Ophelia commits suicide.

“Frailty, thy name is woman!”
• Polonius: “At such a I’ll lose my daughter to him” (2.2.160)
• Gertrude: “Be thou assured, if words be made of breath, And breath of life, I have no life to breathe What thou hast said to me.” (3.4.197-9)

Shakespeare through his depiction of Gertrude and Ophelia sees women as weak and easily manipulated by the men around them.
| **Horatio**  
| **Rosencrantz & Guildestern**  |
| Both Horatio and Rosencrantz and Guildestern are meant to be friends of Hamlet, yet R & G work for Claudius as they attempt to uncover the source of Hamlet’s melancholy.  
| Hamlet tricks R & G by sending them to their death in England, while he saves Horatio by saying that he must tell the tale of what has happened in Denmark.  |
| Hamlet on Rosencrantz and Guildestern – SIMILIE: “…my two school fellows, Whom I will trust as I will adders fanged,” (3.4.204-5)  
| Hamlet to Horatio: IMAGERY of clothes  
“...For what advancement may I hope from thee,  
That no revenue hast but thy good spirits  
To feed and clothe thee?”|