

约克文学作品辅导丛书

YORK NOTES ON

HAMLET

哈姆雷特

William Shakespeare



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GUIDES

YORK NOTES

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William Shakespeare

HAMLET

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《约克文学作品辅导丛书》介绍

《约克文学作品辅导丛书》(York Notes)系 Longman 集团有限公司(英国)出版。本丛书覆盖了世界各国历代文学名著,原意是辅导英国中学生准备文学课的高级会考或供英国大学生自学参考。因此,它很适合我国高校英语专业学生研读文学作品时参考。

丛书由 A. N. Jeffares 和 S. Bushrui 两位教授任总编。每册的编写者大都是研究有关作家的专家学者,他们又都有在大学讲授文学的经验,比较了解学生理解上的难点。本丛书自问世以来,始终畅销不衰,被使用者普遍认为是英美出版的同类书中质量较高的一种。

丛书每一册都按统一格式对一部作品进行介绍和分析。每一册都有下列五个部分。

① 导言。主要介绍:作者生平,作品产生的社会、历史背景,有关的文学传统或文艺思潮等。

② 内容提要。一般分为两部分:a. 全书的内容概述;b. 每章的内容提要及难词、难句注释,如方言、典故、圣经或文学作品的引语、有关社会文化习俗等。注释恰到好处,对于读懂原作很有帮助。

③ 评论。结合作品的特点,对结构、人物塑造、叙述角度、语言风格、主题思想等进行分析和评论。论述深入浅出,分析力求客观,意在挖掘作品内涵和展示其艺术性。

④ 学习提示。提出学习要点、重要引语和思考题(附参考答案或答案要点)。

⑤ 进一步研读指导。介绍该作品的最佳版本;版本中是否有重大改动;列出供进一步研读的参考书目(包括作者传记、研究有关作品的专著和评论文章等)。

总之,丛书既提供必要的背景知识,又注意启发学生思考;既重视在吃透作品的基础上进行分析,又对进一步研究提供具体指导;因此是一套理想的英语文学辅导材料。

北京师范大学外文系教授

钱 璩

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Part 1

Introduction

The Elizabethan age

Queen Elizabeth I came to the throne in 1558 and ruled England until 1603. Her reign brought stability to the country and with stability came prosperity. In order to see how important peace and order were to the Elizabethans, it is useful to contrast Elizabeth's reign with the insecurity and unrest of earlier ages.

Historical background

Elizabeth's grandfather, Henry Tudor, became King Henry VII of England in 1485. His accession and marriage to Elizabeth of York put an end to the civil wars which had racked England for almost a hundred years. Henry VII concentrated on reducing friction at home and abroad and on establishing a strong, financially secure monarchy.

He was succeeded in 1509 by his son Henry VIII who married a Spanish princess, Catherine of Aragon. This marriage did not produce a son and so Henry VIII divorced her. The divorce was condemned by the Catholic Church and, gradually, a split developed between the Pope and Henry. Henry died in 1547 and at that time England was still largely, in practice, a Catholic country, though the supreme spiritual authority of the Pope had been challenged, and many Protestant reformers were eager to spread Protestantism in England.

Henry VIII was succeeded by his ten-year-old son Edward and his Regents furthered the spread of Protestantism. Edward died in 1553 and was followed to the throne by his half-sister Mary, daughter of Catherine of Aragon and a devout Catholic. She attempted to restore Catholicism to England but she died childless and was succeeded in 1558 by her Protestant half-sister, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth adopted what might be called a 'middle way' as far as religion was concerned. She broke the link with Rome but retained many of the practices and beliefs of the old religion. Her 'middle way' satisfied most of her subjects and for the majority of her reign religious strife was avoided. Many different Christian sects became established in England during her reign, however, among them the Puritans who were very critical of the theatre.

Social background

Notwithstanding the political and religious turmoil of the reigns prior to Elizabeth's, most Elizabethans were convinced that they lived in an ordered universe, a universe in which God was supreme and in which angels, men, animals, plants and stones had their allotted place. The Christian view that mankind was redeemed by Christ was rarely challenged by Elizabethans, though points of detail might be argued about. In spite of the teaching that Adam's fall had, to some extent, spoiled God's plan for mankind, there was a widely held belief in universal order and harmony. The stars and the planets were still in accord with the divine plan and it was believed that they gave glory to God by the music of their movements. Shakespeare expresses this idea in his play *The Merchant of Venice* when Lorenzo tells Jessica:

*Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold;
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-ey'd cherubins;
Such harmony is in immortal souls,
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.* (V.1.58–65)

Before Adam's fall, man too could hear the heavenly harmonies. Although the fall put an end to this ideal state, the heavenly bodies continued to influence life on earth. Just as the sun gave warmth and light, just as the moon caused the tidal movement of the seas, so too did the stars and planets affect the earth and its inhabitants. Most Elizabethans attributed certain types of behaviour to astrological causes such as the sign of the zodiac under which a person was born or the relative positions of the planets at a particular time. There is evidence of such a belief in *Hamlet*. In Act I, Scene 4 Hamlet suggests that a man is always condemned for his faults even when the faults are due to the circumstances surrounding his birth rather than to any conscious action on his own part:

*So, oft it chances in particular men,
That for some vicious mole of nature in them,
As in their birth, wherein they are not guilty,
Since nature cannot choose his origin,
By their o'ergrowth of some complexion,
Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason,
Or by some habit that too much o'erleavens
The form of plausible manners – that these men,
Carrying I say the stamp of one defect,
Being nature's livery or fortune's star,*

*Their virtues else be they as pure as grace,
As infinite as man may undergo,
Shall in the general censure take corruption
From that particular fault.*

(I.4.23–36)

Shakespeare's contemporaries, like many people before and since then, were aware of man's paradoxical position in nature. A man was influenced by the stars and planets, subject to his passions and, at the same time, he was made in the image and likeness of God. This duality in human nature is aptly summed up in *An Essay on Man*, a poem by Alexander Pope (1688–1744). Pope described man as:

*Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of Truth, in endless Error hurled;
The glory, jest and riddle of the world.* (Epistle II, 16–18)

Man was most in harmony with nature and with his creator, it was believed, when his reason controlled his emotions. A similar truth was believed to apply to the state. Natural disorders, like storms and earthquakes, were paralleled by passionate outbursts in the individual and by disputes in the state. These views are most clearly seen in such plays by Shakespeare as *King Lear* and *Othello* where storms and bad weather symbolise the turmoil and confusion of the characters, but they were commonly held in Shakespeare's lifetime. We see some evidence of such views in *Hamlet*, in that Claudius's unnatural behaviour in murdering his brother and then marrying his brother's widow causes dissension in the kingdom and his evil action is only purged by his death and the deaths of all those in his immediate family.

William Shakespeare

We know very little about who Shakespeare was or how he lived. And, apart from the ideas expressed in his writings, we know nothing at all about what he thought or how he reacted to the events of his time. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire and was baptised there on 26 April 1564. His father, John Shakespeare, seems to have been reasonably wealthy at the time of William's birth. He had business interests in farming, butchering, wool-dealing and glove-making and he held several public offices in Stratford until about 1578 when his business began to decline.

It seems likely, in view of his father's position, that William was educated at the Stratford Grammar School. He did not, however, go to university and so did not have the type of education which many contemporary playwrights had.

William Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway in 1582, when he was

eighteen and she twenty-six, and they had three children, Suzanna, born shortly after the marriage, and twins Judith and Hamnet born in 1585. We cannot be certain how Shakespeare supported his family during this time. He may have been involved in his father's diminishing business or he may, as some traditions suggest, have been a schoolmaster. Whatever he did, however, it did not satisfy him completely because he left Stratford and went to London.

Once again, we cannot be sure when Shakespeare moved to London. It may have been in 1585, the year when a group of London players visited Stratford and performed their plays there. But we do know that he was living in London in 1592, by which time he was already known as a dramatist and actor. Indeed, even at this early date, his plays must have been popular because, in 1592, Shakespeare was criticised in a pamphlet by a less successful writer, Robert Greene, who wrote that a new and largely uneducated dramatist (that is, Shakespeare) was usurping the position which rightly belonged to university men.

Plague broke out in London in 1592 and all theatres were closed. Shakespeare seems to have used the time of the closure to write two long poems, *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Venus and Adonis* and to strengthen his relationship with a theatre group called the Lord Chamberlain's Men in Elizabeth's reign and the King's Men after the accession of James I in 1603. Shakespeare maintained his association with this company until he retired from the theatre and he seems to have prospered with it.

In 1596 came personal grief and achievement. His son died, and Shakespeare and his father were granted a coat of arms which meant that their status as 'gentlemen' was recognised by the College of Heralds. In the following year, 1597, Shakespeare bought New Place, one of the largest houses in Stratford. In 1599 he bought shares in the Globe Theatre and in 1609 he became part owner of the newly built Blackfriars Theatre. In this year also, he published a collection of sonnets. Shakespeare retired to New Place in 1611 though he did not break all his business contacts with London. He died in Stratford on 23 April 1616 at the age of fifty-two.

Background notes on Elizabethan drama

Records of drama in English go back to the Middle Ages, a period in which numerous 'Miracle' and 'Morality' plays were written. Such plays were often based on biblical themes, especially those involving such miraculous events as the saving of Noah and his family in the ark, or those from which a clear moral could be drawn. Medieval plays were usually written to coincide with such religious festivals as Christmas or Easter and they were often performed in, or near, the church, with most of the community taking part either actively, by playing roles, or passively, as members of the audience.

In the medieval period drama was an integral element in the structure of society. It was an extension of Christian ritual and was meant to make a strong impression on all who participated in the performance. Audiences were meant to be awed by the power and wisdom of God, inspired by the faith and courage of holy men, frightened by the fate of evil doers and amused by the folly of mankind. Drama was thus meant to have a cathartic effect, that is it was intended to improve the members of the audience by giving them an outlet for such emotions as greed, hatred, lust, pity. They were encouraged to sympathise with a character often called *Everyman* who represented all men in their journey through life. The drama of the time, like *Everyman* himself, had a universal appeal. It was written, not for a small élite, but with all members of the society in mind.

In the early sixteenth century the close relationship that had previously existed between Church and State began to change. Individual Christian sects had distinctly different attitudes to the role of drama in society. It was tolerated by Catholics but condemned by Puritans who wished to 'purify' the religious beliefs and attitudes of the time and to encourage people to give up worldly pleasures so that they might attend to spiritual matters. Puritanism grew stronger, especially in towns and cities, in the second half of the sixteenth century and people connected with drama – writers and actors – had to struggle against growing opposition. Elizabethan dramatists often criticised Puritanism in their plays and there is some evidence of such criticism in several of Shakespeare's plays, including *Twelfth Night*. Puritanical opposition to the theatre eventually succeeded in curtailing freedom of speech in drama when it sponsored the Licensing Act which was passed by Parliament in 1737.

In Shakespeare's day, however, the theatre had the support of the Court and many dramatists, including Shakespeare, continued the medieval tradition of producing plays which appealed to all classes and to different levels of intelligence and education.

Contemporary dramatists

Numerous Englishmen wrote plays in the sixteenth century, men such as John Lyly (?1554–1606), Thomas Kyd (1558–94), Robert Greene (c.1558–92) and Thomas Nashe (1567–1601). Among the most talented of these dramatists was Christopher Marlowe (1564–93). He was born in the same year as Shakespeare but seems to have begun writing plays before Shakespeare did. He was a gifted poet and many of his dramatic innovations were adopted by playwrights of his own and of later generations. He was the first English dramatist to make effective and extensive use of blank verse; that is, he frequently used an organised pattern of rhythm in his plays giving his verse the memorability of poetry and the effortlessness of natural speech:

*The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,
 The devil will come, and Faustus must be damned.
 O I'll leap up to my God: who pulls me down?
 See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament.
 One drop would save my soul, half a drop, ah my Christ.*
 (Doctor Faustus, lines 1429–33)

Marlowe was the forerunner of Shakespeare in that he centred his tragedies on one main character, a character with whom the audience could identify. However, he was closer than Shakespeare to the medieval traditions in that his characters tend to behave like supernatural beings rather than real people.

Shakespeare seems to have learned much from his contemporaries, especially Marlowe, and from the medieval dramatic tradition. He borrowed plots and ideas from many sources but they were transformed by his poetry and his dramatic talents.

The Elizabethan theatre

Drama became increasingly secularised during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and plays ceased to be performed in or near a church. Instead, they were often staged in the courtyard of an inn. Putting on a performance in such a courtyard had several advantages. There were many doors which could be used for exits and entrances, balconies which could represent battlements or towers and, best of all, perhaps, there were usually guests in the inn who were glad of an evening's entertainment.

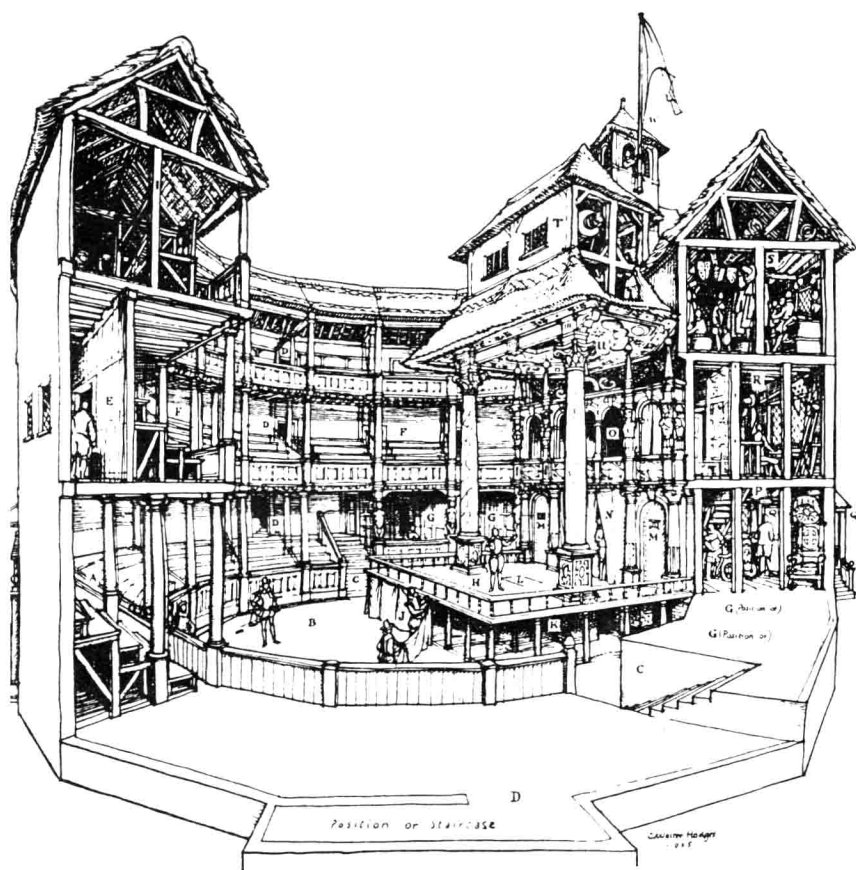
When the first theatre was built in London in 1576 it seemed perfectly natural, therefore, to build it according to the design of Elizabethan courtyards. The theatre had galleries and boxes around the walls where the wealthy sat, and like the courtyard of an inn, it had no roof and so performances were cancelled when the weather was bad. The 1576 theatre and those built subsequently differed from the courtyards in that they contained a large stage – often called an apron stage because of its shape – which jutted out from one wall into the auditorium. The poorer members of the audience were called 'groundlings' and they stood around the stage throughout the performance.

The large apron stage was not curtained from the audience and there was no scenery on it. Indications of where the scene occurred were built into the words of the play. In Act I, Scene 1 of *Hamlet*, for example, Barnardo and Francisco reveal by their words that they are on guard duty and that it is midnight and very cold:

BARNARDO: *Who's there?*

FRANCISCO: *Nay answer me. Stand and unfold yourself.*

BARNARDO: *Long live the king!*



A CONJECTURAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE INTERIOR OF THE GLOBE PLAYHOUSE

- AA Main entrance
- B The Yard
- CC Entrances to lowest gallery
- D Entrance to staircase and upper galleries
- E Corridor serving the different sections of the middle gallery
- F Middle gallery ('Twopenny Rooms')
- G 'Gentlemen's Rooms or Lords Rooms'
- H The stage
- J The hanging being put up round the stage
- K The 'Hell' under the stage
- L The stage trap, leading down to the Hell
- MM Stage doors
- N Curtained 'place behind the stage'
- O Gallery above the stage, used as required sometimes by musicians, sometimes by spectators, and often as part of the play
- P Back-stage area (the tiring-house)
- Q Tiring-house door
- R Dressing-rooms
- S Wardrobe and storage
- T The hut housing the machine for lowering enthroned gods, etc., to the stage
- U The 'Heavens'
- W Hoisting the playhouse flag

FRANCISCO: *Barnardo?*

BARNARDO: *He.*

FRANCISCO: *You come most carefully upon your hour.*

BARNARDO: *'Tis now struck twelve, get thee to bed Francisco.*

FRANCISCO: *For this relief much thanks, 'tis bitter cold
And I am sick at heart.*

BARNARDO: *Have you had quiet guard?* (I.1.1–10)

The lack of scenery was also, in part, compensated for by the use of very rich costumes and music.

In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, it seems likely that plays went on from beginning to end without interval, though the end of a scene is often indicated by such expressions as:

Look to't I charge you. Come your ways. (I.3.135)

and:

Nay let's follow him. (I.4.91)

and by the use of rhyming couplets such as:

*Till then sit still my soul. Foul deeds will rise
Though all the earth o'erwhelm them to men's eyes.*
(I.2.256–7)

and:

*Let Hercules himself do what he may,
The cat will mew, and dog will have his day.* (V.1.258–9)

In Shakespeare's time, women were not allowed to perform on the public stage, and therefore female roles were played by boys. This fact helps to explain why so many of Shakespeare's heroines, heroines such as Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, Rosalind in *As You Like It* and Viola in *Twelfth Night*, disguise themselves as young men. It was easier for a boy to act like a young man than to act like a young woman. Reference to the custom of boys taking female parts is made in *Hamlet*, when Hamlet tells one of the players who is dressed as a woman:

*Pray God your voice like a piece of uncurrent gold be not cracked
within the ring.* (II.2.389–91)

In other words, Hamlet hopes that the young actor's voice will not break and thus force him to give up female parts. A considerable amount of information on the life of the Shakespearean stage and on Shakespeare's attitude to it is presented in Act II, Scene 2 and in Act III, Scene 2. This information is examined in the summaries of these scenes, on pp. 34–44 and 47–53.

Shakespeare's plays

Shakespeare's creative period as a dramatist spans approximately twenty years, from 1591 to 1611. During this time he is believed to have written thirty-seven plays and he may have collaborated with other playwrights in the writing of a number of others. It is not always easy to know when individual plays were written but some idea of dating can be gained from records of performances, from the order given in editions published before and shortly after Shakespeare's death and from references within the play to contemporary events.

Shakespeare's plays were not 'original' in the modern sense of 'new'. Many of his plots were borrowed from history or from contemporary literature but they were moulded by him into unique and successful plays. These can be divided into two main types, comedies which had happy endings and tragedies which involved the death of the main character. In his final works, however, in plays such as *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare often combined sad and joyful events in plays which have come to be classified as 'tragicomedies'.

The nature of tragedy

Tragedies were concerned with the harshness and apparent injustice of life. They involved the trials and eventual death of a hero who was an important person and whose death led to the downfall of others. Often, the hero's fall from happiness was due to a weakness in his character, a weakness such as the overweening ambition of Macbeth, the uncontrolled jealousy of Othello or the excessive pride of Coriolanus. Hamlet is among the most complex of Shakespeare's tragic heroes and it is thus not easy to pinpoint one specific flaw which brings about his untimely death. Hamlet will be more fully discussed in the character analyses in Part 3 but it would be true to say that he is a thinker involved in a dilemma which can only be resolved by a man of action. His inability to act swiftly and decisively in connection with his father's murder brings havoc to the Danish court.

Hamlet belongs to a genre of plays often called 'revenge tragedies'. These were popular in Elizabethan England and in them a hero is called upon to punish an evildoer for a crime he has committed. Often in such plays there is a ghost who cannot rest until the person who has caused his death is killed. The Ghost in *Hamlet* is thus a traditional figure whose role is to urge the hero to avenge an evil deed.

Title and history of *Hamlet*

Usually this play is referred to as *Hamlet* but its full title is *The Tragical History of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, and the title was meant to be