

The Prince of Denmark, the title character, and the protagonist. About thirty years old at the start of the play, Hamlet is the son of Queen Gertrude and the late King Hamlet, and the nephew of the present king, Claudius. Hamlet is melancholy and cynical, full of hatred for his uncle's scheming and disgust for his mother's hasty marriage. A reflective and thoughtful young man who has studied at the University of Wittenberg, Hamlet is often indecisive and hesitant, but at other times prone to rash and impulsive acts. Hamlet has fascinated audiences and readers for centuries, and the first thing to point out about him is that he is enigmatic. There is always more to him than the other characters in the play can figure out. He actually tells other characters that there is more to him than meets the eye as he says to his mother, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. When he speaks, he sounds as if there is something important he is not saying. A university student whose studies are interrupted by his father's death, Hamlet is extremely philosophical and contemplative. Faced with evidence that his uncle murdered his father, Hamlet becomes obsessed with proving his uncle's guilt before trying to act. Although he is thoughtful to the point of obsession, Hamlet also behaves rashly. When he does act, it is with surprising swiftness and no premeditation, as when he stabs Polonius through the curtain without even checking to see whom he is. He seems to step very easily into the role of a madman. Hamlet is extremely disappointed with his mother for marrying his uncle so quickly, and he rejects Ophelia, a woman he once claimed to love, in the harshest terms. His words often indicate his distrust of women in general.