Hamlet Introduction

Please bring your *Hamlet* book to class all week. We will begin listening to Act I together.

Reminder: Your reading check for your research novel is Oct 21.

Important Terms

Machiavellian – characterized by unscrupulous or immoral cunning, deception, or dishonesty

Existentialism – analysis of individual existence in an unfathomable universe and the plight of each individual; man assumes ultimate responsibility for actions of free will; no certain knowledge of what is right or wrong

Nihilism – the rejection of traditional values and beliefs/religions, often in the belief that life is meaningless; man's existence is senseless and useless

Metadrama/metatheatre – aspects of plays that draw attention to its nature as a drama, especially through the use of soliloquies, asides, prologues, epilogues, and references to acting

Important Terms

- <u>Aside</u>: When a character addresses the audience or another character on stage in a manner that presumes the other characters cannot hear him.

- <u>Monologue:</u> A long dramatic speech directed at other characters in the play.

- <u>Soliloquy:</u> A speech given by a character alone on stage, meant to reflect the character's innermost thoughts and struggles.
  - **Hamlet will give SEVEN soliloquies in this play. They are crucial in tracking the conflicts, themes, and character development of Hamlet.**

- <u>Blank verse vs prose:</u> blank verse are lines written in unrhymed iambic pentameter whereas prose is meant to mimic the more natural flow of speech.
  - Shakespeare uses this to distinguish class as well as an indicator of Hamlet's mental state throughout the play.

Background of the Play

- Written in 1600 or 1601 and first performed in 1602

- The origin of *Hamlet* comes from a Scandanavian tale called *Amleth* or *Amlóði* (which means "mad" or "not sane" in Old Norse) was put into writing around 1200 AD

- Thematic influences come from the Renaissance:
  - The 15th-century **Renaissance** brought with it a new interest in the study of human experience and awareness. Scholars and artists purported that the human understanding of the world was based on appearance, and that it was only with great difficulty (if at all) that humans could see beyond these appearances in order to see the "real."

The Revenge Genre

- *HAMLET* is a story driven upon the need to revenge a murder in a family. In a typical revenge plot, there are no authorities to appeal to, either because the original criminal is too powerful (i.e. has become king) or those in position to act do not know about or believe in the criminality of the villain.

- In a revenge plot, the avenger assumes responsibility early and spends much of the story overcoming various obstacles before carrying out his/her mission.

Motifs and Conflicts
Look for the following motifs and conflicts. These will be important in discovering the themes of the play.

- "PLAY" – ACTING
- SPYING
- DECAY/CORRUPTION
- MADNESS
- APPEARANCE VS REALITY
- ACTION VS INACTION

Characters

- Setting: Elsinore Castle in Denmark
- Hamlet: Prince of Denmark, currently home from his studies at Wittenberg for his father's funeral and mother's marriage.
- Gertrude: Queen of Denmark, Hamlet's mother
- Claudius: New King of Denmark after the death of his brother, Hamlet's uncle and step-father
- Polonius: Lord Chamberlain of Claudius' court, Claudius' right hand man when it comes to spying and mischief, father of Ophelia and Laertes
- Horatio: Hamlet's closest friend
- Laertes: Polonius' son, quick to action = foil for Hamlet
- Ophelia: Polonius' daughter, Hamlet's love interest
- The Ghost: the spectre of Hamlet's dead father