

---

---

**: STRUCTURE :**

---

---

**6.0 Objectives****6.1 Introduction****6.1.2 The Ghost as a Manifestation of the Inner Mind****6.1.3 Oedipus Complex****6.2 Soliloquies****6.3 Play within the Play****6.4 Symbols****6.5 Let Us Sum Up****6.6 Key Words****6.7 Books Suggested****Answers**

---

---

**6.0 OBJECTIVES**

---

This unit will help you;

- to analyse a work of literature from the point of view of psychology,
- to interpret words in relation to unspoken thoughts,
- to study symbols and images as reflecting the inner workings of the human mind.

After this section, you will be able to;

- appreciate the creative process of the artist,
  - analyse fictional characters using language and methods of psychology.
- 

**6.1 INTRODUCTION**

---

The tragedies of Shakespeare are mainly about a tragic hero and the tragic flaw that leads to the death of the hero in most cases. The play *Hamlet* is about the Prince of Denmark—Hamlet—who warned by the ghost (King Hamlet) about the real nature of the present king Claudius decides to avenge the death of his father. This play is as much about the external actions as it is about the workings of the inner mind of the characters. The arena shifts in such plays from the outside to the inside. Shakespeare proves again and again that he possessed an extraordinary ability to understand human thought processes from the ‘inside out’. In attempting to understand the way his characters act, he understood the way they think and feel. He looks at the thought processes going on in the minds of his characters and thus delineates them accordingly. In *Hamlet*, it is his conscience that leads to his tragic flaw of procrastination. The psychological study of jealousy and melancholia runs parallel to the story of revenge. In *The Living World of*

Shakespeare, John Wain writes : “Where the conventional revenge play, hero is kept from fulfilling his vow only by material difficulties, Hamlet hesitates because of conscience”. All the events of the play are interwoven around this : the inner emotion and its dramatic manifestation. Shakespeare understood our inner demons and knew how to express them on the written page, and hence Shakespeare does not limit this only to the protagonists; he presents the inner working of the mind of almost all the characters : in the hypocrisy of Polonius, “This above all—to thine own—self be true”, (Act 1 Scene 3) in the protective unspoken love of Laertes for his love—lorn sister Ophelia, “Be wary then, best safety lies in fear”, (Act 1 Scene 3), in the troubled drawn between son and husband Gertrude when she says, “ Good Hamlet, cast thy knighted colour off/ And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark” etc. (Act 1 Scene 2).

In this unit, we shall discuss the various facets of the relationship between psychology and literature in Hamlet.

### **6.1.2 The Ghost as a Manifestation of the Inner Mind :**

The ghost is a recurring character in Shakespeare's tragedies. Though critics may argue that it was introduced to entertain the groundlings, we can see that it performs a far more important function. The ghost appears in *Macbeth* as Banquo, in *Julius Caesar* as Caesar, in *Richard III* as ghosts of Henry VI and Edward IV, in *Cymbeline* as ghosts of Pothouse's father, mother and brothers etc. In *Hamlet*, it is used to give a voice to the doubts that Hamlet harbours. When he says, “the funeral baked meats/Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables”, (Act I Scene2)he is certainly voicing his feelings about the undue haste of his mother's marriage to his uncle in spite of the regicide and these same ideas are expressed by the ghost in much more stronger language. It is the inner working in Hamlet's mind that finds an external appearance and expression in the ghost. The dramatist also clearly describes the difference in the attitude of Hamlet and his father to the sin of Claudius : The ghost is more critical of Claudius than Hamlet is. To the ghost, he is “that incestuous, that adulterate beast...with traitorous gifts... won to his shameful lust...” (Act I Scene 5), but to Hamlet it is his mother who is more guilty because of her lust and incest. “Within a month/ ... A little month or ere those shoes were old/ with which she followed my poor father's body/ ...why she, even she /married with my uncle/... With such dexterity to incestuous sheets”. (Act 1 scene2) The Ghost, however, advises Hamlet, not to Plan revenge against his mother : “Leave her to Heaven, / And to those thorns in her bosom lodge/ To prick and sting her”. (Act 1 Scene 5) This again is a manifestation of Hamlet's inability to plan to harm his mother.

<b>CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1</b>
------------------------------

1.a) What is the function of the ghost in *Hamlet* ?

.....  
.....  
.....

1.b) Has the ghost appeared in other plays of Shakespeare ?

.....  
.....  
.....

2. **STATE WHETHER TRUE OR FALSE.**

a) The Ghost is more critical of Gertrude than of Claudius.

.....  
.....  
.....

b) Gertrude married Claudius soon after her husband's death.

.....  
.....  
.....

**6.1.3 Oedipus Complex :**

Moreover, that brings us to the Oedipus complex. A whole new approach to literature began with the theories of Freud and the acceptance that ‘literature is entwined with the psyche’. Hidden from the workings of the conscious mind, the unconscious, Freud believes, plays a large part in how we act, think, and feel. In the interaction of the conscious and unconscious working together, argues Freud, we shape both ourselves and our world. Freud says, “the poet's psychology is with which we are confronted in Hamlet.” To him the play *Hamlet* is based on the same soil as Oedipus Rex. The Oedipal complex, also known as the Oedipus complex, is a term used by Sigmund Freud in his theory of psychosexual stages of development to describe a child's feelings of desire for his or her opposite-sex parent and jealousy and anger towards his or her same-sex parent. Hamlet seems to possess that Oedipal complex more in relation to Claudius who now demands to be made his father, accept his position as Gertrude is now his wife and queen. Dr Jones says, that the intrinsic evidence from the play, “decisively shows that Shakespeare projected into it his inmost soul.” Ives Hendricks believes, “the drama tells the story of incest and patricide with more disguise”. Throughout the play, Hamlet seems to dwell on his mother's sexual proclivities more than one would usually associate with a son. “O most wicked speed to post/ With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!” (Act 1 Scene 2) And later in coarser words, “Good night— but go not to my uncle's bed...Refrain tonight,/ And that shall lend a kind of easiness/ To the next abstinence.” (Act 3 Scene 4). The Queen is not protesting and gives Hamlet more courage to continue in the same vein, almost crossing all bounds of decency in a mother-son relationship : “Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed/ Pinch you on your cheek, call you his /mouse...” (Act 3 Scene 4). Shakespeare's role in feeding food to psychology and the 19th and 20th century psychoanalysis tradition through his plays and dramas is a testament to his insights into human nature. The Oedipal complex often finds expression also in his soliloquies, almost all through the play.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2**

1. a) Who propounded the theory of Oedipus complex ?

.....  
.....  
.....

1. b) Give one example of this complex from the play (which has not been listed above).

.....  
.....  
.....

**2. FILL IN THE BLANKS WITH APPROPRIATE WORDS/ PHRASES.**

- (a) The Oedipus Complex refers to an attraction towards the \_\_\_\_\_ .
- (b) Literature is entwined with the \_\_\_\_\_ , according to Freud.

---

**6.2 SOLILOQUIES**

---

The soliloquies in *Hamlet* are an important aspect of the psychological study in literature. A soliloquy is defined as an act of speaking one's thoughts aloud when by oneself or regardless of any hearers, especially by a character in a play. Shakespeare uses this very effectively in almost all his great plays. His focus is not only on crafting characters but on simulating their thought processes. This focus on process – that is, on how a character progresses in a line of thinking – helps the reader to enter the mind of the character and to understand why he acts the way he does, what propels him forward in a particular direction. One of the best-known soliloquies – “To be or ...”. clearly shows us the psychological state of the protagonist and makes his tragic flaw of procrastination very evident. “And thus, the native hue of resolution/ Is sickled o'er with the pale cast of thought/ And enterprises of great pitch and moment/ With this regard their currents turn awry/ And lose the name of action”. (Act 3 Scene 1) This conflict or disgust within himself is spread through the entire tragedy. Suicidally depressed by his father's death and his mother's remarriage, the possibility of suicide as an escape comes to Hamlet quite early in the play, showing the reader the wavering nature which seems to get more and more engrained as the play progresses : O that this too too solid flesh would melt,/Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!/ Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd/ His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! O God!” (Act 1 Scene 2) Hamlet's self-loathing which reveals his present state of mind is clear when he says, “Yet I- A dull and muddy mettled rascal/... Am I a coward ?”. (Act 2 Scene 2).With each soliloquy, the reader gets a clearer picture of a complete disintegration of Hamlet.

In Ophelia, we see the inner working when she becomes insane. Ironically, Hamlet pretends to be mad in order to achieve his purpose while Ophelia becomes stark mad and to the extent that she finally takes her own life. When she goes mad, she sings a bawdy song about a maiden who is

tricked into losing her virginity with a false promise of marriage. Ophelia's soliloquy ends with : "O woe is me/ T'have seen what I have seen, see what I see". She feels that she has been cheated because merely pretended to love her and these suppressed feelings of betrayal and dishonesty work on her innocent mind till she finally ends it all.

Through his soliloquies too, Shakespeare gave us the psychodramas on the stage through which we can project our internal worlds and learn from the characters he invented.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 3**

1.a) Can you define a soliloquy ?

.....  
.....  
.....

1.b) Identify the soliloquy in Act 4 Scene4 which shows the mental agony of Hamlet.

.....  
.....  
.....

**2. MATCH THE WORDS/ PHRASES IN COLUMN A WITH THE APPROPRIATE ONES IN COLUMN B.**

A	B
(i) self-slaughter	(a) unheard by others
(ii) soliloquy	(b) Hamlet
(iii) wavering nature	(c) a sin

**6.3 PLAY WITHIN THE PLAY**

Hamlet's ploy of catching the guilty conscience of Claudius by having a play enacted along the same lines of Claudius's murdering of his brother clearly proves Shakespeare's knowledge of psychology even before these theories were propounded. Hamlet makes his intentions clear in this soliloquy : "I'll have these players/ Play something of the murder of my father/ Before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks, / I'll tent him to the quick. If he does blench, / I know my course". (Act 2 Scene2) The dumb-show is the prelude to the actual staging of the play. Hamlet chooses to sit at Ophelia's feet rather than next to the Queen, partly to encourage the idea that his madness is caused by disappointed love, but mainly because he could not watch the King's face if he sat next to the royal pair. Hamlet gives a detailed introduction to the play : "The Mouse-trap.... This play is the image of a murder done in Vienna.... Tis a knavish piece of work." (Act 3 Scene) When the actual play echoes the actions of Claudius, he rises in terror with "give me some lights. Away!" (Act 3 Scene 2), Hamlet is convinced that the Ghost had spoken the truth. This play-within-the-play further helps the dramatist to reveal his own theories of play-acting. However, the ability to trap the king into a virtual admission of his guilt

by his reaction to the scene is another example of the use of psychology by the dramatist.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 4**

1.a) Why does Hamlet want Claudius to watch the play ?

.....  
.....  
.....

1.b) Why does Claudius call for lights ?

.....  
.....  
.....

**2. GIVE REASONS**

a) Hamlet sits at Ophelia's feet.

.....  
.....  
.....

b) Shakespeare had a knowledge of psychology.

.....  
.....  
.....

---

**6.4 SYMBOLS**

---

Following Freud's theory in the interpretation of a piece of literature, the psychoanalytic critic tends to see all concave images (Ponds, flowers, cups or vases, caves, and hollows) as female symbols, and all images whose length exceeds their diameter (towers, mountain, peaks, snakes, knives, lances and swords) as male symbols. Shakespeare uses symbols and images profusely in his tragedies. (The animal imagery in *King Lear* is the best example.) Symbols help create meaning and emotion.

In this play, poison is an important symbol. It stands for treachery and disloyalty, death and dishonesty. At the beginning of the play, the ghost tells Hamlet how he was murdered by his brother : Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole/ With juice of cursed hebona in a vial, / And in the porches of my ears did pour/ The leperous distilment” (Act1 Scene 5). And at the end of the play, it is poison which causes Hamlet's death : “O, I die, Horatio! / The potent poison quite o'er crows my spirit” (Act 5 Scene 2).

Flowers are another often used symbol in the Elizabethan Age. Ophelia, gone mad after her father's death gives different flowers to different people—symbolism clearly suggests the inner working of the broken heart of Ophelia : violets to herself, pansies to Polonius, rosemary to Hamlet etc. Each flower is associated with a certain quality which she probably realises even in her insane condition. (Act 4 Scene 5)

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 5**

1.a) What is the function of a symbol in a work of art ?

.....  
.....  
.....

1.b) Why does Ophelia choose different flowers ?

.....  
.....  
.....

---

**6.5 LET US SUM UP**

---

In this unit you have learnt;  
the relationship between literature and psychology,  
the importance of the inner workings of the mind of characters.

---

**6.6 KEY WORDS**

---

**Thought processes** : the process of using your mind to think something carefully.

**Oedipus complex** : unconscious sexual desire for the parent of the opposite sex and begins around the age of four.

**Conscience** : the part of your mind that tells you if what you are doing is right or wrong.

**Soliloquy** : a speech in a play when a character is alone and speaks on his inner thoughts.

**Play within a play** : a play that is played within the confines of another play.

---

**6.7 BOOKS SUGGESTED**

---

Shakespeare William, *Hamlet* (Any good student edition)

Knight, Wilson G. *The Imperial Theme*

Leech, Clifford Shakespeare : *The Tragedies*

Guerin Wilfred L. et al A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature (available online)

(PDF) *The Contribution of Psychological Theories in Literary Criticism*. Available from : [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273853336\\_The\\_Contribution\\_of\\_Psychological\\_Theories\\_in\\_Literary\\_Criticism](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273853336_The_Contribution_of_Psychological_Theories_in_Literary_Criticism)

