

# HAMLET: CYBERMADNESS

## RESOURCE HANDOUT

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Dear Teachers and Students

Thank you for supporting *Hamlet: CyberMadness*. The aim of the *Hamlet: CyberMadness Resource Handout* is to expand upon themes and motifs introduced in the performance. Additionally, there are activities at the end of this handout that aim to enhance student appreciation and enjoyment of *Hamlet*. Please give them a try as it is an opportunity for students to become more familiar with characters from the play and embody the language of Shakespeare.

To give you background on the *raison d'être* for our production, I will discuss our approach to creating theatre that is moving, meaningful and aims to resonate with young people.



Design by Marcus Bale

The key theme focussed on in our production of *Hamlet* was Madness. Focussing on a key theme in a Shakespeare play and tying it with a modern concern (like Social Media Addiction in *Hamlet: CyberMadness*), is a method we employ to make our productions relatable for secondary school students. We know from student feedback that their engagement is enhanced by shedding a light on an issue that has relevance for them (e.g. The topic of the Black Lives Matter movement featured in our production of *Othello: The Colour of Skin*). This can bolster their engagement with a given Shakespeare play by making the theatrical experience meaningful for them.



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This is especially important because young people who attend our shows might never have been to a play before. You couldn't really expect them to sit quietly through a performance of Shakespeare where, as far as they are concerned, the actors might as well be speaking a foreign language (Donohoe, 2011). Therefore, we believe it is important that performances of Shakespeare's plays for young audiences have relatable themes that can bridge the gap in learner understanding.

Furthermore, in our shows there are no actors standing still for several minutes delivering a monologue, as they will lose the attention of the young audience. A cornerstone of my work is directing actors to embody Shakespeare's language using physical imagery (Donohoe, 2011) with a heightened use of language where that is coloured with a wide range of emotions. Actors performing in this way can help the audience to understand a character's intentions even though they may not explicitly understand every word that is said.

In summary, connecting Shakespeare's plays to young people's concerns, with performances brought to life with imagery and emotional conviction, can add value to student learning. It helps them understand how the poetry and language of Shakespeare has stood the test of time and moved so many people for four centuries and counting.

Lastly, I hope you enjoyed our production of *Hamlet: CyberMadness* and look forward to hearing your feedback to help us continuously improve our productions for the benefit of our young audiences.

Sincerely

Peadar Donohoe - Director

## THEMES AND MOTIFS INTRODUCED IN *HAMLET: CYBERMADNESS*

### THEMES

- MADNESS
- APPEARANCE VS. REALITY
- CORRUPTION
- HAMLET'S CONSCIENCE
- ACTION VS. INACTION
- WOMEN IN THE PATRIARCHAL WORLD

### MOTIFS

- DEATH
- SEXUALITY
- EARS/HEARING
- GOOD VS. EVIL

I'll begin the discussion with **Madness** as it was the guiding theme that shaped the adaptation.

# HAMLET: CYBERMADNESS

## MADNESS AND SOCIAL MEDIA ANXIETY DISORDER

In our adaptation of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, we suggest that Hamlet's 'Madness' is fuelled by his addiction to social media which results in Social Media Anxiety Disorder (SMAD):

It's driven by a compulsive need to check status and notifications, and to have posts and comments liked, shared, and commented on by others. Eventually, it becomes an all-consuming obsession, which in turn leads to a deep-rooted sense of inadequacy about your life or your appearance (O'Callaghan, 2023).



Photo by Martin-dm

'Madness' was a kind of catch-all appellation given to people who were experiencing mental health problems which Elizabethan society was often at a loss to explain or help people deal with (Owens, 2018). Fortunately, we have come a long way since the sixteenth century and are in a much better place to help those who suffer from a range of mental health illnesses.

Many young people are obsessed with being contactable 24/7, often spending three or more hours a day on their phone (Twenge, 2023). Since 2012, when the majority of teenagers became mobile phone owners, teens began to spend more time on social media and less time interacting with each other face to face. Clinical levels of depression doubled between 2011 and 2019 among 12 to 17 year olds (Alter, 2023) with life satisfaction plummeting as teens began to experience a range of mental health problems due to over usage of mobile phones. Over usage of mobile phone technology can result in and/or exacerbate depression, stress, anxiety, paranoia, fear of missing out (FOMO), loneliness, body image issues, nausea, headaches, eating disorders, the promotion of symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), isolation, self-harm, suicidal ideation and completion (Alter, 2023; Edwards and Jackson, 2023; Havjovsky et al., 2021; O'Callaghan, 2023; Ra et al., 2018; Twenge, 2023).



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## MADNESS AND SOCIAL MEDIA ANXIETY DISORDER (CONT.)

Photo by Fabio Principe



Furthermore, even though depressive symptoms for teens have risen sharply, girls seem more affected, most likely because they tend to be more social than boys (Havjovsky et al., 2021). For example, boys' depressive symptoms increased by 21 percent from 2012 to 2015, while girls' increased by 50 percent - more than twice as much. Also, the rise in suicide is more pronounced among girls. Although the rate has increased for both sexes, three times as many 12-to-14-year-old girls died by suicide in 2015 as in 2007.

It is a very alarming increase but there are many ways teens can be helped, some of which are discussed and referred to on pages 21 and 22 of this resource. For those who want to read more on the effects of Social Media Anxiety Disorder, there is an additional discussion you can go to on page 17.

I will now move on to other themes and motifs that influenced our adaptation of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, beginning with a discussion on how the **Madness** Theme has been interpreted in the past.

## MADNESS

Whether to play Hamlet as a mastermind who simply pretends to be mad, someone who has lost his sanity, is suffering from depression or an overlap of all three states is an important creative decision, as it will affect the overall tone of the production and how the actor interprets and plays the character.

The argument for Hamlet as a mastermind who pretends to be mad is supported textually when he says to Horatio and Marcellus in Act 1, Scene 5 that he will be putting on an "antic disposition". Hamlet does this to buy himself time to gather evidence to find out if Claudius is actually the murderer of his father or not. However, the gathering of evidence takes much longer than he anticipates.

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## MADNESS (CONT.)

Because of this, it could be argued that Hamlet's long delayed revenge drives him over the edge. The stress of the situation he is in, distrusting everyone and acting crazy for months at a time, puts him in a frame of mind where he commits acts that are out of character, such as: being extremely cruel to Ophelia and then murdering her father Polonius in a mindless rage (albeit by accident). However, these aren't just mere outbursts. He shows very little remorse for the pain he causes which is consistent with someone who has lost their sanity.

Furthermore, Hamlet's level of sanity is worth reflecting on in light of Act 3, Scene 4, when Hamlet sees the ghost of his father, but Gertrude does not. Is the ghost only making himself visible to Hamlet? Or has he actually gone mad, seeing illusions created by his own fractured state of mind? Or could it be that he has lost reason for a period of time due to deep depression?

A deep depression would explain Hamlet's out of character acts, as he explains to Horatio near the end of the play:

If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,  
And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,  
Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.  
Who does it, then? His madness. (Hamlet, Act 5, Scene 2)

Could it be that when Hamlet says he was 'from himself...ta'en away', is he trying to find the words to say he was suffering from a deep depression (e.g. high levels of irritability, poor decision making, suicidal ideation)? In Shakespeare's day such symptoms would have been considered madness or melancholia, umbrella terms used for many mental health problems.

In choosing to play Hamlet as a mastermind, mad, depressed or choosing to play the character with an overlapping of the three states could be a key reason why Hamlet is arguably Shakespeare's greatest play. Deciding on Hamlet's state of mind opens the door for a variety of directorial and performance interpretations, allowing every new production to make inspired choices. However, interpretation of Hamlet's state of mind is not just down to choices in a particular production.



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## MADNESS (CONT.)

The reader is also entitled to their own view. Furthermore, your analysis of Hamlet's state of mind could be an exam question. Therefore, when writing about the play, it would be helpful to support your view with quotes from the text. Hence, to aid your studies you can refer to the following quote table.

### QUOTES TO SUPPORT DIFFERENT MADNESS INTERPRETATIONS

MAD	METHOD	DEPRESSION
Noble and sovereign reason like sweet bells jangled out of tune. (Ophelia, Act III, Sc. 1)	Though this be madness, yet there is method in it. (Polonius, Act II, Sc. 2)	...that the Everlasting had not fixed his canon agaisnt self-slaughter. (Hamlet, Act I, Sc. 2)
This is the very coinage of your brain. (Gertrude, Act III, Sc. 4)	I essentially am not in madness but mad in craft. (Hamlet, Act III, Sc. 4)	I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth. (Hamlet, Act II, Sc. 2)
He is gone. Far, far gone. (Polonius, Act II, Sc. 2)	Get from him why he puts on this confusion. (Claudius, Act III, Sc. 1)	To be or not to be... (Hamlet, Act III, Sc. 1)

## APPEARANCE VS. REALITY

The theme of **Appearance versus Reality** runs throughout the play. Many characters put on false masks of truth and honesty to hide their real motivations.

In order to find out who murdered his father, Hamlet tries to uncover the true natures of Claudius, Polonius, Guildenstern and Rosencrantz. They are all corrupt liars who make it difficult for Hamlet to find out the truth. So, Hamlet fights fire with fire when he decides to put on a mask himself. For example, in Act 1 after he meets the ghost who claims to be his father, Hamlet says to Horatio and Marcellus:

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## APPEARANCE VS. REALITY (CONT.)

Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,  
How strange or odd so e'er I bear myself...  
As I perchance hereafter shall think meet  
To put an antic disposition on...to note  
That you know aught of me. This not to do,  
So grace and mercy at your most need help you,  
Swear. (Hamlet, Act 1, Sc.5)

The 'antic disposition' Hamlet refers to is the mask of madness. He'll put on the appearance of being mad so that members of the royal court will drop their guard in his presence, thinking Hamlet to be mentally incompetent. Deceiving them in this way, Hamlet hopes to gain evidence to find out who murdered his father.

Even though Hamlet hides his true motives from other characters, he takes a different tack with the audience. In his soliloquies and asides, he shares his philosophical musings, doubts, despair, anger and plans for vengeance. Sharing the reality of his true self in this way, reveals his vulnerability, gaining the audience's sympathy, even as he becomes corrupted himself.

## CORRUPTION

The theme of **Appearance vs Reality** is closely connected to the theme of **Corruption**, as it is usually the corrupt who wear false masks because they need to hide the reality of their true intentions.

**Corruption** is epitomised in the quote: "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (Marcellus, Act 1, Scene 4). The statement criticises the state of affairs in Denmark which include: a ghost that haunts the castle of Elsinore, the sudden and suspicious death of King Hamlet, the rapid assumption to the throne by Claudius and the hasty marriage of Hamlet's mother to her brother-in-law, which would have been shocking to the people of time.



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## CORRUPTION (CONT.)

In Shakespeare's day most people were highly religious and well-versed in the Bible. According to the Old Testament, marriage between in-laws was considered incestuous. Hence, the citizens of Denmark would have considered the union between Claudius and Gertrude sinfully wrong, and evidence of corruption within the state. But as far as corruption goes, this is only the start of things.

Shakespeare weaves the theme of corruption into every scene to illustrate the corrupt state of Denmark. Images of disease in the text such as ulcers, pleurisy, full body pustules, apoplexy and madness parallel the sins of drunkenness, espionage, war, adultery and murder to reinforce the central idea that Denmark is a corrupt state. As Hamlet says, the very air he breathes is: "a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours" (Act 2, Scene 2).



Photo by Shane Vaughan

Marcus Bale/Claudius

Hamlet himself suffers from a deep melancholy that results in fits of mania. This mania leads him, in Act 3, Scene 4, to mistakenly kill Polonius in a fit of rage. You could argue that this scene is where Hamlet himself becomes corrupt as he shows very little remorse for his act of violence. It could also be argued that after killing Polonius, who is the King's Lord Chamberlain and father of his girlfriend Ophelia, the desperate Hamlet feels that he has nothing left to lose. Being religious, he knows his soul would be damned for this murder.

Hence, Hamlet's corruption may explain the trap he lays for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in Act 5, Scene 2. Hamlet reveals to Horatio that he found a sealed letter Claudius had written ordering his death by the English king. Cunningly, Hamlet forges a new letter ordering the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, his two school chums, in his stead. It now seems that the Hamlet of Act 5 has metamorphosed from the troubled, but essentially good young man we met in Act 1, who simply wanted justice for his murdered father, into a corrupted soul, ready to commit acts that are evil in nature. What has become of his conscience?



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## HAMLET'S CONSCIENCE AND ACTION VS. INACTION

Is Claudius the murderer or not? The ghost of King Hamlet told Hamlet that Claudius was indeed his killer and commands him to "Revenge my most foul and unnatural murder" (Act 1, Scene 5). But Hamlet's conscience makes him pause. Is the ghost, who certainly looks like his father, actually the spirit of his father? Or is it a demon assuming the shape of his father, trying to trick Hamlet into committing a mortal sin, thus claiming his soul for the Devil and dooming his soul to eternal damnation? Hamlet just doesn't know for sure, and it is his:

...dread of something after death,  
The undiscovered country from whose bourn  
No traveler returns, puzzles the will  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
Than fly to others that we know not of?  
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all...  
(Hamlet, Act 3, Sc.1)

Hamlet is tortured by the sinful implications of wrongful revenge. Killing an innocent Claudius would mean the 'undiscovered country' Hamlet would be going to is hell. And so, full of doubt, he goes on to say:

...the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
And enterprises of great pith and moment  
With this regard their currents turn awry  
And lose the name of action.  
(Hamlet, Act 3, Sc.1)

Because of his conscience, Hamlet cannot act. He needs evidence.

The evidence comes when Hamlet witnesses Claudius' reaction to death of the king in the play *The Mousetrap*. Hamlet writes the play specifically to gauge Claudius' reaction to the murder of the Player King. Furthermore, the murder depicted is exactly how the ghost of Hamlet's father told him he was killed.



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## HAMLET'S CONSCIENCE AND ACTION VS. INACTION (CONT.)

When the Player Murderer pours the poison into the sleeping Player King's ear, Claudius rises and cries out for light, running from the room. It's then that Hamlet's convinced he has caught "the conscience of the King" (Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 2). He reasons that Claudius' guilt has spurred this inappropriate, out of character reaction.

So, why doesn't Hamlet kill Claudius there and then or when he finds him alone in the church? There are several reasons:

- The king is always under guard, so it would be difficult for Hamlet to find the right moment.
- Hamlet is always being watched, not only when he is in court, but also by the king's spies.
- Most importantly of all, Hamlet will not kill the king while he is praying for forgiveness in the chapel because, if he did so, he believes the spirit of the king would go to heaven and what Hamlet wants is for the king to go straight to hell.

Hamlet's conscience ties him up in knots and blunts his ability to take revenge. To highlight Hamlet's inability to take action, Shakespeare includes other characters who are capable of taking revenge:

- Fortinbras goes to great lengths to seek his revenge for the murder of his father by King Hamlet and ultimately succeeds in conquering Denmark.
- Laertes has no problem in seeking the revenge for his father's death by Hamlet. Declaring to Claudius he will: "cut his throat i' th' church" (Laertes, Act 4, Scene 7).

Ironically though, it is Hamlet's lack of action that ultimately leads to his doom. His revenge is only achieved when he kills Claudius at the end of the play. Even then, it is only because Claudius' plan to kill him backfires, when Gertrude drinks the poisoned wine intended for Hamlet.

Perhaps if Hamlet acted earlier, the death of his mother and others could have been avoided. That said, so much pain and suffering might have been avoided if Gertrude had confided in Hamlet, telling him, for example, how she thought and felt about her husband's sudden death. However, we never get to know what's on Gertrude's mind or how she navigates life in the patriarchal world.

# HAMLET: CYBERMADNESS

## WOMEN IN THE PATRIARCHAL WORLD

There are only two women in the play: Gertrude and Ophelia. But who are they? We never really get to know how their minds work compared to Hamlet's. Gertrude has no soliloquies and Ophelia only has one which is all about Hamlet.

In Shakespeare's day, all the women's parts were played by men because there was a law against women playing on stage. Hence, it is no wonder that the play is very patriarchal. That said, the female characters do have pivotal roles that affect Hamlet greatly.

Hamlet is at his most agitated when talking to either female character. Although he cares for both, he's suspicious as well. In the case of his mother, Hamlet feels she remarried too quickly, and her hasty marriage means that she didn't really love her first husband, Hamlet's father. With regards to Ophelia, when Hamlet realises she is a willing pawn of Claudius and Polonius, he feels betrayed and wants rid of her: "...get thee to a nunnery" (Act 3, Scene 1).

There are good reasons why both women act in the ways that they do. They live in a patriarchal world and have learned to live by its laws. In the world of the play, women have very few prospects. Either like Ophelia, they are passive and do what men tell them to do: plan for marriage, be a housewife and raise children; or like Gertrude, they might be in a position to wrest some power within the political status quo.

By marrying Claudius, Gertrude retains power and can also protect her son Hamlet. Consider what might have happened if she didn't marry Claudius: they could have been excluded from court, banished or maybe have died in mysterious circumstances like King Hamlet. The problem for the audience is that we never get to know the inner workings of Gertrude's mind. Unlike Hamlet, Shakespeare doesn't give her soliloquies allowing her to share her thoughts and feelings with the audience.



Photo by Gerry McCabe

Shannon Ayako Martin/Ophelia



# HAMLET: CYBERMADNESS

## WOMEN IN THE PATRIARCHAL WORLD (CONT.)



Photo by Paula Trojner

Rosie Hayes/Gertrude

So, we never get to hear if she ever loved King Hamlet or not. It's quite possible that Gertrude's love for her first husband was genuine but it is also quite likely she didn't get to see much of him. He was a warlike king who led his country into battle. However, wars are very time consuming and not conducive to fostering relationships.

For example, the war campaign against Norway would have taken him away from Elsinore for a long period of time. This would have left Gertrude with an awful lot of time on her hands. During this time, she may have strengthened her relationship with her brother-in-law Claudius, leading to romantic involvement. There is evidence for this as the ghost of King Hamlet tells Hamlet that Claudius: "Won to his shameful lust, the will of my most seeming-virtuous queen" (Act 1, Scene 5).

If the ghost is to be believed, this would mean that Gertrude was having an affair before King Hamlet was killed. Or was she just a pawn in Claudius' quest for power? Or was she being cunning and protective? For example, by marrying Claudius, she gets to retain power and all the rights and privileges of a queen. This means she could also act as a buffer between Claudius and Hamlet, thus, keeping her son, an heir to the throne, alive. This view of Gertrude's character portrays her as a good mother trying to make the best out of a difficult situation.

Ophelia, on the other hand, does get at least one soliloquy where she shares her inner thoughts and feelings with the audience. In her soliloquy from Act 3, Scene 1, she shares how upset she is, devastated that Hamlet seems to have lost all reason, denying he ever loved her. Here, she engages our sympathy, not only because of her mistreatment by Hamlet, but also because we come to see that she is a victim and pawn of the political machinery, letting her father Polonius and King Claudius use her as bait in a spy trap for Hamlet.

# HAMLET: CYBERMADNESS

## WOMEN IN THE PATRIARCHAL WORLD (CONT.)

Prior to Act 3, Scene 1, Polonius reports to Claudius and Gertrude that Hamlet is madly in love with Ophelia. Gertrude hopes that by confessing his love for Ophelia, it may lead to curing his madness. This reasoning appeals to Ophelia's mind. For if she can get Hamlet to confess his love for her, she hopes they can be married and live happily ever after.

This is very naïve of course, but Ophelia has been brought up to believe that marriage is the ultimate goal for women. Furthermore, to marry well, as her manipulative father Polonius hopes she will, would be the icing on the cake. However, the plan fails terribly, and it is arguable that this scene is the beginning of Ophelia's descent into madness.

Gertrude and Ophelia do not fare well in the plot of *Hamlet*. Ironically though, the play speaks multitudes about the struggles and unfair choices women have had to make throughout history. *Hamlet* exposes the limited choices available to them – even noble women like Gertrude.

Furthermore, it is arguable that Hamlet is a misogynist. He is obsessive about the women in his life, expressing hostility and ridicule for their actions which he sees as weakness: "frailty thy name is woman" (Act 1, Scene 2, Hamlet). However, Gertrude and Ophelia may feel they have been forced to take the actions they did, in order to survive in a cruel, patriarchal world. In the final analysis, because of the limited life choices open to them and their lack of a voice in the play, the characters of Gertrude and Ophelia can only engage our sympathies rather than hostility.



*Ophelia* by Sir John Everett Millais



# HAMLET: CYBERMADNESS

## MOTIFS

Four motifs are depicted in *Hamlet: CyberMadness*: Death, Sexuality, Ears/Hearing via the Motivars (a portmanteau combining the words Motif and Avatar) and Good vs. Evil via the medium of costumes.

### Motivars

The Three motifs of Death, Sexuality and Eavesdropping are represented by three online Motivars named: **Random**, **Barbie Girl** and **Superior Guy** who are an online chorus that follow Osric's MeVid video blogs.

In the play Osric is a courtier who attends to King Claudius. In our adaptation the character of Osric is a right-wing nationalist who is supportive of the political status quo. His **MeVid** video blogs report on the activities of Elsinore court, helping to propel the narrative with the Motivars commenting and reacting to his posts.



Shane Casey as Osric

An additional function of the Motivars is to add another social media layer to the always online, 24/7 world that Hamlet and Ophelia inhabit. As Death is arguably the key motif in *Hamlet*, I'll begin this discussion by looking at the Motivar named **Random**.



The name **Random** is intentionally ironic because most deaths in *Hamlet* are anything but random, as Death and its consequence are featured throughout the play. For Hamlet there is no escape from thoughts of Death: from his ideation of suicide, its consequences, the possibility of a life hereafter, to the revealing of his death obsession when questioned by Claudius on the whereabouts of Polonius' body:

# HAMLET: CYBERMADNESS

## MOTIFS (CONT.)

He's at supper...Not where he eats, but where he is eaten.  
A certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him.  
Your worm is your only emperor for diet.  
We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots.  
Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service -  
- two dishes, but to one table. That's the end.  
(Hamlet, Act 4 Scene 3)

In other words: we eat life and in death we are eaten. The frailty of human existence haunts Hamlet throughout the play and that is why it is often considered the central motif.



The Motivar **Barbie Girl** represents the image women, surviving in the patriarchal world of Denmark, are conditioned to adopt to gain favour from males who treat them as objects of desire. In the patriarchal world of the play women have no career choices. They have little to look forward to except to marry well and sire the next generation of male heirs. The only way to achieve any power for themselves is to get it through men, which is what Gertrude achieves.

When King Hamlet, her first husband, dies, she has little choice but to marry his brother Claudius. If she refuses, it is likely she and Hamlet could be banished or die in mysterious circumstances like her deceased husband. Therefore, it could be that Gertrude marries Claudius to retain some power within the political status quo while keeping herself and Hamlet safe. However, Shakespeare never gives Gertrude a soliloquy to share with the audience her aspirations, fears and motivations. Additionally, until Act 3, Scene 4 she never has a private moment with her son to explain why she was so quick to marry Claudius. Stripped of an interior voice, all the audience sees before them is the 'Barbie Girl' queen.

The motif of Ears/Hearing is represented by **Superior Guy**. In Elsinore, there is very little privacy as servants who spy for the King are everywhere. In this adaptation **Superior Guy** is an Elsinore servant. As an insider, he cheers on Osric, helping to support the political status quo under Claudius. However, Claudius is a dishonest man who has murdered his own brother by pouring poison into his ear. This act is the seed of the play's plot and is also highly symbolic.



# HAMLET: CYBERMADNESS

## MOTIFS (CONT.)

The ghost of King Hamlet tells his son that the rumoured story he was killed by a snake is a lie, declared to Hamlet that “The whole ear of Denmark is by a forged process of my death rankly abused” (The Ghost, Act 1, Scene 5). Hence, the poison poured in King Hamlet’s ear by Claudius becomes a metaphor for the corrosive effect Claudius’s poisonous words have had on the health of the Danish state.

### Good vs. Evil

In our production you may have noticed that the costumes are predominantly in white, grey and black. This motif for the costumes ties into the themes of **Good vs. Evil** and **Corruption**. Characters don costumes depending on where they are on the corruption spectrum. For example, at the start of the play we see a good Hamlet predominantly costumed in white and remains associated with this colour until Act 3, Scene 4 when we see him wearing grey. In this crucial scene, he violently accosts his mother Gertrude and then goes on to accidentally kill the blundering Polonius (believing him to be Claudius).

By Act 5, Scene 2 we see that he is wearing mostly wear black. In this scene he tells Horatio that he forged a letter to have Rosencrantz and Guildenstern killed in his stead. In relaying the story, he expresses no remorse, believing their deaths to be a consequence of their own actions due to their betrayal of him.

In a contrast of costumes, in Act 1, Scene 1 we see Hamlet’s chief enemy, Claudius, dressed in black, signifying him as the villain. Then in Act 3, Scene 3 he dons grey when he’s in the chapel confessing his sin of murder, begging forgiveness from the heavens. Hence, as the play progresses, the lines between Good and Evil become blurred as does who wears which colour costume. Thus, when it comes to revenge, with the ultimate goal being retribution via murder, staying on the side of the angels accoutred in white seems impossible.



Photo by Philip Corkery

Kyle English/Hamlet



# HAMLET: CYBERMADNESS

## ADDENDUM

### Negative effects of smartphone use continued

This section has additional material for the discussion begun in **Madness** and **Social Media Anxiety Disorder** found at the start of this resource. Below are ways in which overuse of smart phones and pre-occupation with social media can affect mental health:



Photo by Anna Stills

### Feelings of loneliness and FOMO

Social-networking sites promise to connect friends but the portrait of teens emerging from the data is one of a lonely, dislocated generation (Twenge, 2017). Teens who visit social-networking sites every day, but see their friends in person less frequently, are the most likely to agree with the statements “A lot of times I feel lonely,” “I often feel left out of things,” and “I often wish I had more good friends.” (Twenge, 2017)

Social media also exacerbates a common teen concern about FOMO (fear of missing out). On average, teens these days go to fewer parties and spend less time together in person, but when they do congregate, they document their hangouts continuously on social media (Twenge, 2023). Those not invited are keenly aware of it. Accordingly, the number of teens who feel left out has reached all-time highs across age groups. Like the increase in loneliness, the upswing in feeling left out has been swift and significant.



# HAMLET: CYBERMADNESS

## ADDENDUM (CONT.)

### Addiction and Anxiety

Smartphones have an addictive quality, thus gaining entry into the 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Care New England, 2022). Phone addiction can manifest with loss of interest in activities, anxiety when you cannot send or receive messages, and irritability when one is away from their phone.

Unfortunately, Irish young people are more addicted to their smartphones than most young people in the rest of the world (Deloitte, 2020). Ireland frequently ranks as the most smartphone-addicted country in Europe and the western world as a whole (O'Brien, 2021). A survey of 2500 Irish students (O'Sullivan, 2017) reported that 43% viewed social media as a source of stress in their lives and unhappiness.

### Depression/Unhappiness

All screen activities are linked to less happiness, and all non-screen activities are linked to more happiness (Twenge, 2017). The more time teens spend looking at screens, the more likely they are to report symptoms of depression (Twenge, 2023). For example, twelve year olds who spend 10 or more hours a week on social media are 56 percent more likely to say they're unhappy than those who devote less time to social media.



Design by Marcus Bale

The opposite is true of in-person interactions. Those who spend an above-average amount of time with their friends in person, are 20 percent less likely to say they're unhappy than those who hang out for a below-average amount of time. Those who are heavy users of social media increase their risk of depression by 27 percent, while those who play sports, go to religious services, or even do homework more than the average teen cut their risk significantly.

# HAMLET: CYBERMADNESS

## ADDENDUM (CONT.)

### Body Image

When questioned about the influence of social media on their body image, 46% of adolescents aged 13 to 17 reported that it had a negative impact, making them feel worse (Orr, 2023). A report by the U.S. Surgeon General also blamed social media for perpetuating eating disorders, body dysmorphia as well as low self-esteem (Edwards and Jackson, 2023).



of social media on their body image, 17 reported that it had a negative impact, making them feel worse (Orr, 2023). A report by the U.S. Surgeon General also blamed social media for perpetuating eating disorders, body dysmorphia as well as low self-esteem (Edwards and Jackson, 2023).

Females tend to be more adversely affected than males when it comes to excessive smartphones usage (Nam, 2023). Studies indicate that smartphone usage can affect young females negatively because they can be developmentally susceptible to poor body esteem (Yang et al., 2020). Higher phone usage time can lead to more negative associations about body image regardless if a woman is overweight or not (Nam, 2023).

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### Sleep deprivation, Reduced Attention and Productivity

For optimal health sleep experts say that teens should get between 8-10 hours of sleep a night (Paruthi et al., 2016). However, children who use a media device right before bed are more likely to sleep less than they should, more likely to sleep poorly, and more than twice as likely to be sleepy during the day (Carter et al., 2017). Due to excessive phone use, many now sleep less than seven hours most nights. This is significant because, on its own, sleep deprivation can cause mental health issues. Sleep is absolutely crucial for physical health and for mental health. Not getting enough sleep is a major risk factor for anxiety and depression and self-harm (Twenge, 2023).

### Reduced Attention and Poor Academic Performance

In general too much use of smartphones lowers the attention span of individuals (Sunday et al., 2021). So, it should come as no surprise that smartphone addiction has negative impacts on student learning and overall academic performance. The greater the use of a phone while studying, the greater the negative impact on learning. The skills and cognitive abilities students needed for academic success are negatively affected by excessive phone use leading to a diminished level in learning (Care New England, 2022).



# HAMLET: CYBERMADNESS

## ADDENDUM (CONT.)

### Discussion

Our levels of smartphone use should be a big red flag to us all, as there is no shortage of peer-reviewed, in-depth scientific studies that show a clear correlation between smartphone use and mental health issues. There is even anecdotal evidence about the dangers of electronic device use to young people from the iconic forerunners of the development of computing and social media (Sacks, 2020):

- Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple Computers, forbade his children from using the iPad he launched. He told an interviewer, “We limit how much technology our kids use at home.”
- Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft, laid down a limit on the screen time his daughter was allowed. The rule was 45 minutes on weekdays and 1 hour on weekends.
- Even Spiegel, the founder of Snapchat, imposed a rule of only 90 minutes screen time per week for his 7 year old stepson.
- Mark Zuckerberg, creator of Facebook, along with his wife, published an open letter to their new born daughter explaining it was important to make time to “go outside and play”, because “childhood is magical”.



Photo by Nadezhda1906

Isn't it ironic? These giants of computing and social media were and are very aware of the dangers to their children and sought to prevent harm to their mental health.

Regardless of this anecdotal evidence, the scientific data speaks loud and clear: not only is there a clear link between smartphone ownership and risks to mental health, but also between time spent on a smartphone and level of unhappiness. Researching and writing this overview of the dangers of smartphone and social media overuse, I became quite alarmed by the research literature. My response was, “is there anything that can be done about this?” Fortunately, there is plenty that can be done. In the next section there is advice on how to use smartphone technology wisely and productively.

# HAMLET: CYBERMADNESS

## ADDENDUM (CONT.)

### Using Smartphones Positively

1. Set goals for when you can use your smartphone. For example, you might schedule use for certain times of day, or you could reward yourself with a certain amount of time on your phone once you've completed a homework assignment.
2. Don't bring your phone or tablet to bed. The blue light emitted by the screens can disrupt your sleep if used within two hours of bedtime.
3. Be conscious of social media and its impact on your mood and well-being; How is your mood after using social media? Are you depressed or anxious?
4. Turn off push notifications for social media, or if you are reluctant to turn off all notifications, enable 'priority mode' (android) or 'do not disturb' (iOS) so you will only receive notifications during a set time frame.
5. Ironically, apps can also help you monitor and limit your social media use, just Google: 'apps that help you monitor and limit your social media use' and you will find a wide range of apps that can be helpful.
6. What you put online can stay online forever. What you post can be forwarded to many people you never intended to receive it. Make a firm rule that you should never post anything that you wouldn't want everyone to view.
7. At meal times or get together with family or friends, don't ignore the person(s) in front of you. Get into the habit of putting your phone on silent or airplane mode. Engage with the person you are with.
8. Make time to see your friends in person. Those who spend an above-average amount of time with friends in person than on the phone, are more likely to be happier.
9. Next time you go out to dinner, note the number of people sitting down together for a meal NOT talking to each other. These days, it happens everywhere you go—people gathering in a group only to ignore their companions in favor of the person(s) on the other side of their gadget.
10. Choose friends/followers wisely, so as not to expose yourself to content that will only upset you and/or make you feel bad about yourself. Remember that what you see online is not always a true version of reality.
11. If you are suffering from harassment or abuse, take a screenshot for evidence and report it to the provider.
12. Like anything that can affect your mental health, if you are concerned about your social media usage, talk to friends, parents, teachers and/or access help. The following providers may be of help.



# HAMLET: CYBERMADNESS

## ADDENDUM (CONT.)

### Helpful contacts (click on each name to access the site)

- [reachout.com](#) - offers comprehensive information on all aspects of mental health and how to get help.
- [childline.ie](#) - provides support through online chat or helpline for those under 18.
- [jigsaw.ie](#) - has online and services around the country with advice and support made available to young people aged 12–25 years-old.
- [spunout.ie](#) - works with young people to support mental health and well-being by creating evidence-based, person-centred digital solutions.
- [turn2me.ie](#) - provides a confidential space for users to gain support for their mental health online.
- [yourmentalhealth.ie](#) - provides information on mental health, support services near you and the everyday #littlethings that can make a difference to your mental health and wellbeing.
- [bodywhys.ie](#) - offers online support for eating disorder issues, including an online group counselling service.
- [drugs.ie](#) - offers drug and alcohol information and support including a 'live helper' service that lets you chat to a staff member online.

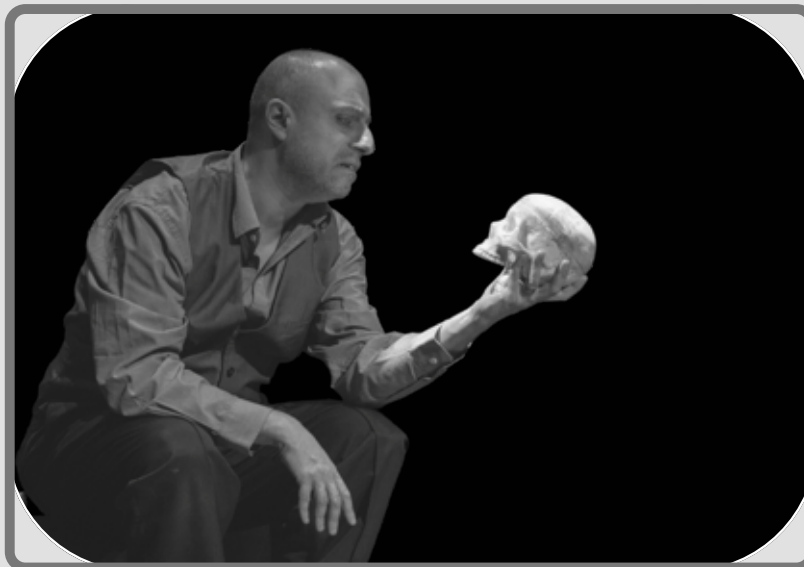


Photo by Shane Vaughan

Marcus Bale/Gravedigger

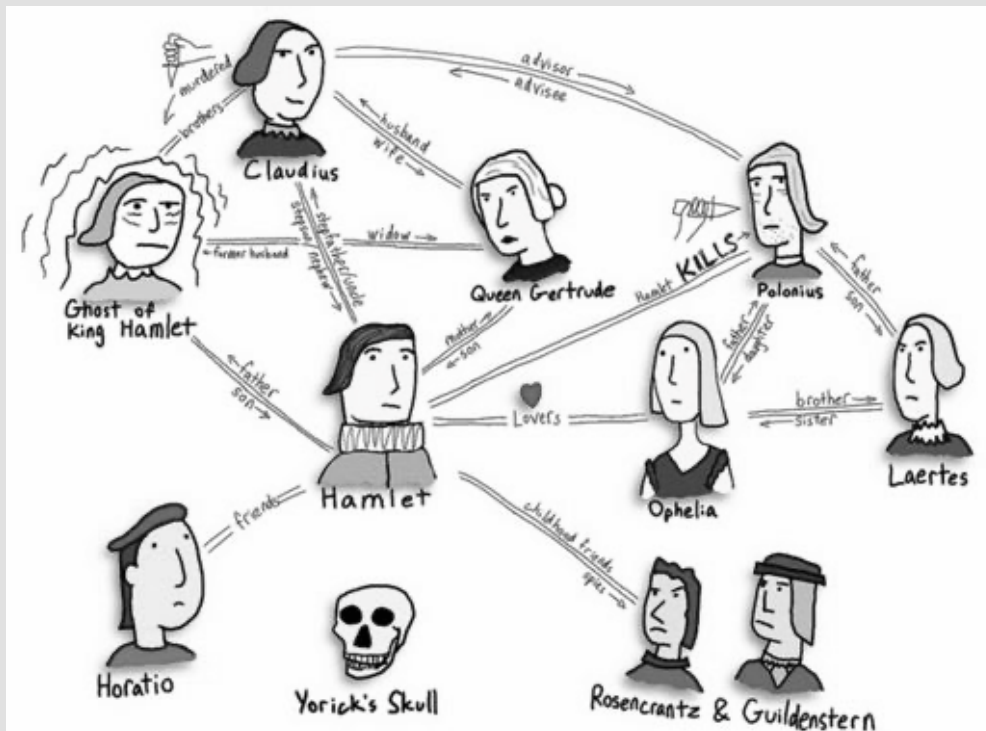
# HAMLET: CYBERMADNESS

## ACTIVITIES

### MIND MAP

This exercise can be done individually or in groups. Choose a main character you would like to explore further. Make a list of everything you think is important for your character. This could be: people they talk about, things they do, words they use or how others describe them.

Take a fresh piece of paper and write the character's name in the middle. Imagining this paper is your character's mind, fill the page with words or drawings from your list. If you think something or someone is important to your character, place it nearer their name and those less important further away. You can make this map as full and colourful as you like.



Hamlet Mind Map by Shannon Louise McKee

Once the mind map is finished you will probably be more familiar with your character and can empathise more easily with their plight.

# HAMLET: CYBERMADNESS

## HOT-SEATING - SCRIPTING AND PLAYING

Hot-seating is an activity where a student actor/volunteer is questioned by the rest of the class about a chosen character. It's like putting a character on trial. King Claudius and Queen Gertrude are perfect for this activity, as the sudden, unexplained death of King Hamlet and their subsequent haste to marry are highly suspicious.

First, students discuss questions they would like to ask King Claudius and Queen Gertrude. This will help build student enthusiasm for the Hot Seating activity to come. The teacher moderates the debate about what is to be asked and why. Here are some sample questions:

### For King Claudius:

- How exactly did King Hamlet die?
- Were you jealous your brother had all the power?
- Did you fancy Gertrude before King Hamlet died?
- Why did you become King after King Hamlet died? (Wasn't Prince Hamlet next in line for succession?)

### For Queen Gertrude:

- Did you ever really love King Hamlet?
- Were you having an affair with Claudius prior to King Hamlet's death?
- Why were you so quick to marry him after your husband's death?
- Do you think Claudius murdered your husband? Were you his accomplice?

Second, students volunteer for the parts of King Claudius and Queen Gertrude. The rest of the class questions them from the prepared list. Student actors should draw on the script as much as possible. However, some responses might have to be made up. This is fine as long as it is within the realm of possibility. Also, not all questions have to be scripted. During Hot-seating, character responses might inspire the class to ask new questions.

Hot-seating can be useful for exploring the circumstances of any character. For example, Hamlet could be Hot-seated and questioned about his relationship with Ophelia.

- Did you ever love Ophelia?
- Why did you treat her so terribly? Telling her, 'get thee to a nunnery'?
- How do you think she felt after you killed her father? Did you check in on her?

## TXT THE PLOT

In groups try to put together a text message narrating the plot of the play in no more than 160 characters. You can use abbreviations, emojis, full words or a mix of everything. Have fun!





# HAMLET: CYBERMADNESS

## RE-IMAGININGS

### Re-imagining Act 3, Scene 4:

#### What if Gertrude told Hamlet the 'truth' about her relationship with Claudius?

Re-imagining scenes is an interactive form of drama that explores better outcomes for scenes that end negatively. It is a fun way to inspire students to think about character motivation and the plot of the play they are studying.

Key question for students to consider: What could Gertrude have said to Hamlet to convince him that marrying Claudius was the best for the Kingdom and themselves? As Gertrude doesn't have any soliloquies in Hamlet, where we get to hear her interior thoughts and motivations, there are number of potential responses to this question. Review the theme of **The Role of Women in the Patriarchal World** to aid responses to this question.

First, organise students into groups of five and have them discuss potential reasons why Gertrude was so quick to marry Claudius. Information from this discussion could help students find material to help Gertrude build up a defence. Second, students can choose to make a presentation of the scene by reading it to the class or performing it.

In the presentation format, each group elects a leader to share with the class their group's ideas of how Gertrude could have convinced Hamlet that marrying Claudius was for the best.

For the performance format, ask volunteers from each group to perform at top of the class and stage the scene finishing with their new ending. Tell them not worry about the exact lines as the dialogue can be in modern English.

# WHAT IF ?



# HAMLET: CYBERMADNESS

## ELSINORE NEWS SPECIAL MeVid VLOG

Partner up with a co-host and choose one scene of the play to make a one-minute video blog news report. You can create your own channel name and logo and upload it to the net to receive comments from other students and friends.

## HAMLET IN A MINUTE!

In groups of four to six students perform the play in one minute. Try and include as much plot detail and characters as possible. The most detailed performance wins!

## SHORT FILM CLASS PROJECT

This activity combines **Elsinore News Special MeVid Vlog** with **Hamlet in a Minute!** This is an extra fun version as it combines the two scenarios above. Start the short film with the video blog hosts giving some background and then cut to a scene from the play. Cut back and forth as much as you like. The Vloggers can also present scenes from different groups so that everyone in the class can be included. Assign the students scenes in a linear fashion mirroring the plot to aid the reporting. This can be done in one or two class sessions or rehearsed over time, polishing the scenes to make a short film or performed presentation.

# HAMLET: CYBERMADNESS

## PRE-SHOW QUESTIONNAIRE

Discuss these questions with your students and write in their most relevant answers/questions below or on a separate sheet of paper. Their responses may be used during the performances of *Hamlet: CyberMadness* (please be advised that responses must be returned to us two weeks prior to the performance your school is attending. Please email completed sheets to [admin@cyclonerep.com](mailto:admin@cyclonerep.com) ).

### DISCUSSION QUESTION 1

In Act 3, Scene 3, we saw Hamlet in the church when he finally had the moment he'd been waiting for: Claudius on his own. The perfect moment to take his revenge for his father's death. So, why do you think Hamlet didn't kill Claudius there and then?

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### DISCUSSION QUESTION 2

During the performance the characters of Gertrude, Ophelia, Claudius and Hamlet will be Hot-seated (see the *Hot-Seating* exercise in the **Activities** section for more info). Are there any questions you would like to ask about their role, motivation or actions in the play? Please write your questions in the space below.

Hamlet Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Ophelia Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Gertrude Question: \_\_\_\_\_

Claudius Question: \_\_\_\_\_



# HAMLET: CYBERMADNESS

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