UNIT 4 *HAMLET* : OTHER DIMENSIONS

Structure

4.0 Objectives

4.1 Introduction

4.2 *Hamlet's* Soliloquies

4.3 The question of subjectivity

4.4 Osric

4.5 Claudius

4.6 Horatio

4.7 Let Us Sum Up

4.8 Questions

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to acquaint you with the soliloquy as an important dramatic convention, as well as focus on the many soliloquies present in *Hamlet.* By the end of this Unit you will also be made familiar with the various characters present in the play *Hamlet.*

4.1 INTRODUCTION

A linguistic phenomenon has been described as " the outcome of natural situations and the state of character's emotions" [Liisa Dahl, *Nominal Style in Shakespearean Soliloquy with Reference to Early English Drama* . . . ,(sic.) 1969]. Charles Lamb, therefore, thought of the dramatic language as imperfect means of communicating "the inner structure and workings of mind in a character." Characters do, and at some length, what persons never do—speak alone for a considerable length of time, and in verse, too. But the soliloquy, as we shall see, has this unique ability to suggest the subtleties of the hidden self of the speaker. In the Elizabethan dramatic tradition soliloquy became widely used as a vehicle for subjective utterance and became an important dramatic convention. *Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, Dr Faustus,* all contain important examples. In the Elizabethan and Jacobean period the playwrights made extensive use of the soliloquy in their plays and the soliloquy, in turn, opened up many dramatic opportunities for the development of theatre. In the process of developing the soliloquy, the Elizabethan verse found an opportunity to attain superior levels of achievement.

Much like a monologue a soliloquy implies a single speaker. It also implies a listener. In the imaginative space of a soliloquy, a speaker as well as a listener become legitimate *dramatis personae*. Frequently, the listeners are the audience. The dramatists, thus, were able to convey a great deal of information about characters—their innermost thoughts, feelings, passions and motives--directly to the audience.

One must add that in *Hamlet* what Richard Hillman describes as "fictional interiority" is created and communicated not only through soliloquies but also "various kinds of monologues, asides and even silences" [*Self Speaking in Medieval and Early Modern Drama: Subjectivity, Discourse and the Stage*, 1997]. Other mechanisms by which the illusion of interiority is maintained include Hamlet's book in act II: reading can be considered as "one way of presenting intreriority, or at least contemplation, on stage," Edward Burns [*Character: Acting and Being on the Pre-Modern Stage*, 1990] maintains.

The development of the villain as an important ingredient in the dramatic tradition of this period further contributed to the refinement of the soliloquy. Much like the Devil in the Morality plays, the villains, too, comment on other characters and action of the play, manipulate the plot and reveal their own mind and thoughts to the audience. For instance, Iago's soliloquy in *Othello*.

Soliloquies often tend to be interior debates –that is what Hamlet's soliloquies are--as much as direct addresses, such as the one Falstaff makes on honour while speaking directly to the audience.

4.2 *HAMLET'S* SOLILOQUIES

Two of the seven soliloquies in *Hamlet* occur in act I [scene ii, lines 129-159 and scene v, lines 92-111], and one in act ii [scene ii, lines 553-585]. There are three soliloquies in act III, one each in scene one [lines 56-88], scene two [lines371-382] and scene three [lines 73-95]. The last soliloquy occurs in act IV, scene iv [lines 32-66]:

1. that this too too sullied flesh would melt, . . . I.ii.129-159
2. O all you host of heaven! . . . I.v.92-111
3. O what a rogue and peasant slave am I! . . . II.ii.553-585
4. To be, or not to be, that is the question, . . . III.i.56-88
5. 'Tis now the very witching time of night, . . . III.ii. 371-382
6. Now might I do it pat, now a'is praying-- . . . III.iii. 73-95
7. How all occasions do inform against me, . . . IV.iv.33-66

The first soliloquy occurs before the ghost has appeared and the suggestions of a possible treacherous murder have been made to Hamlet. He comes to the world of Elsinore, so to say, with his heart heavy with grief for his father's death and the haste with which his mother disowns his father posthumously and accepts Claudius as her husband. Hamlet emerges as a ruminative, reflective and a private person, much loyal to the memory of his father and stunned at his mother's incestuous conduct. This soliloquy also marks Hamlet's recognition that the world is full of both evil and good—a world in which Hyperion and satyr are brothers. His mother's conduct pains him the most—

so loving to my mother
That he might not between the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly . . . .
. Why she would hang on him

As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it had fed on; and yet within a month— . . .
. . . ere those shoes were old
With which she follow'd my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears . . .
. . . married my uncle, . . .

It is the corruption in his mother's conduct that makes him feel his own flesh "too, too sullied." It is in this frame of mind that Hamlet reacts to what life in the world of Elsinore offers him.

The next soliloquy shows Hamlet committing himself to avenge his father death. This soliloquy too deepens his disgust with his mother conduct and the fact that he is his mother's flesh and blood receives a reminder. The third soliloquy finds him remorseful for not having taken any action to avenge his father's death. There is yet another implied and understated reference to his mother in the lines in which he describes Claudius as "bloody, *bawdy* villain! / Remorseless, treacherous, *lecherous*, *kindless* villain!"

To be, or not to be," the fourth soliloquy, is the most philosophical statement that Hamlet makes in the play and has provoked much debate and is perhaps the most discussed and interpreted. One of the major concerns that Hamlet's ruminations focus on in this soliloquy is the conflict between passion and reason. In the seventeenth century books such as Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) and Thomas Wright's *The Passions of the Minde* (1601) as well as in books published abroad and circulated in the original as well as in English translation including Philippe de Mornay's *The Defence of Death* (1577) and Nicolas Coeffeteau's *A Table of Humane Passions* (1621), passions clouded reason and it was in the interest of the individual as well as the society to keep them in check. Cicero had described passions as "perturbations, the troubled or stirred motions of the mind strayed from reason: enemies of the mind, and also of a quiet life."

Hamlet is portrayed as possessed of the passion of melancholy—sorrow and fear being two other emotions, it was believed, that accompanied melancholy. Right from the beginning Hamlet is portrayed as melancholic. He himself says: "How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable seems to me all the uses of the world." His mother begs him to "cast" his "nighted colour off." "The dread of something after death" constantly hangs heavy upon the mind and thoughts of Hamlet. And yet he admires anyone who can control passions and rise above them. A stoic response to the misfortunes of life is something he aspires to be able to show. He praises Horatio as one who "is not passion's slave." He finds Ophelia, Polonius and especially his own mother slaves of passion.

While reviewing a performance of *Hamlet*, G. B. Shaw once wrote:

> And please note that this is not a cold Hamlet. He is none of your logicians who reason their way through the world because they cannot feel their way through it: his intellect is the organ of his passion: his eternal self-criticism is as alive and thrilling as it can possibly be. The great soliloquy—no: I do NOT mean "To be or not to be"; I mean the dramatic one, "O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!"—is as passionate in its scorn of brute passion as the most bull-necked affirmation or sentimental dilution of it could be.

All the soliloquies express various passions associated with melancholy and the longer soliloquies seek to attain the stoic ideal of "imperturbability." "To be, or n[illegible]

to be," shows Hamlet holding a book, a characteristic gesture on the part of a melancholic—nothing would seem to be more natural.

The fifth soliloquy, "'Tis now the very witching time of night," reveals Hamlet resolute: "Now I could drink hot blood, / And do such bitter business of the day / Would quake to look on." He, in this soliloquy, returns to his mother's incestuous, unnatural conduct, refers to Nero (who had had his mother Agrippina put to death, who had poisoned her husband, the emperor Claudius), hopes to be able to control his anger while confronting her with the truth of her actions. The sixth occurs in the prayer scene and contains one more reference to his mother—"My mother stays," as does the last soliloquy—". . . my mother stained . . . . "

All the soliloquies emphasise the idea of the delay in the mental make-up of Hamlet, as well as the delay embedded in the plot-structure of the play. They reveal Hamlet given to self-reflection and excessively speculative, indecisive, and irresolute. Hamlet also comes across as a scholar, and a poet. The soliloquies reveal Hamlet's tragic flaw that turns *Hamlet* into a tragedy and Hamlet as the prime agent who brings about the tragic denouement: Hamlet thinks too much. He weighs the consequences of action to such an excessive length that action becomes postponed as reflection takes the place of action itself. In a sense, one can characterise all the soliloquies as variations on the same theme: an obsessive concern with his mother's incestuous conduct and the contamination that he feels has befouled him, too, as her son.

4.3 THE QUESTION OF SUBJECTIVITY

Laurel Amtower, ["The Ethics of Subjectivity in *Hamlet,*" *Studies in the Humanities*, 21.2 (December 1994):120-133] examines the "uncomfortably close connection between the subjective bias of human values and the so called moral enforcement of an absolute law." *Hamlet,* Amtower maintains, exemplifies a situation in which there exist no absolutes. The task before Hamlet is left to him to interpret, to his discretion. The specifics of his obligation are not identified. Each character's attempt to construct meaning for her/himself according to a perspective is severely limited by a context. If the subject is guided by its culture's value system, the answer is that conformity is illusionary as in the play value is always recreated from the standpoint of a subjective agency. Amtower counters the assumption of cultural materialists such as Dolimore, Barker, Reiss and Belsey, that the individual consciousness of the Middle Ages was essentialist and monolithic, isolated from the political and natural spheres, and naively comfortable with its moral responsibilities. Amtower believes that Hamlet's subjectivity is "profoundly and imperturbably pre-modern, a summation in a single character of an entire age and its point of view." Middle Ages thus for him had a highly developed sense of subjectivity. Hamlet thus has to justify his task not only politically and theologically but in the light of "who he *is*". An early Hamlet seeks to efface his own subjectivity to the fulfilment of absolute prescription. His madness thus is the abandonment of ethics to solipsism of the subject, the abnegating of the social for the fullest satisfaction of the private. Amtower goes on: "Instead of realising that he, like every entity of the play, is moved by the greater contexts of discourse and community that immerse him, Hamlet responds with greater attempts at control and repression, marked by irrational outbursts, manslaughter, and finally murder." The later Hamlet "judges by absolute law--but that absolute law is his own." The tyrannical Hamlet, Amtower believes, "at the end of the play actually prefigures the tyrannical, moralising repression that will later characterise the Puritan Commonwealth. It is thus the later Hamlet, Amtower concludes, who offers a model of modern subjectivity. In *Hamlet,*

he maintains, "The concept of a balanced subject disintegrates, leaving in its stead only victims and tyrants."

4.4 OSRIC

Osric is generally considered a minor character and the only useful function his character serves in the play is to present a contrast through his ridiculous behaviour to Hamlet's serious and dignified conduct. He is also treated by the readers as well as the directors of the play as a clown who provides comic relief in the play.

But the attention that Shakespeare bestows upon his character would suggest that he had much more than this in his mind. He is surely not meant to be a comic character and, thus, a mere source of comic relief in the play This is clear from the fact that the source of comic entertainment is, more often than not, the prince himself. Also, the gravediggers are the ones who provide comic pleasure in the play either through their own interaction with each other or with Hamlet. Osric performs no function in the play other than propose a wager—an action that Shakespeare could easily have assigned to any other unimportant character. He appears in one of the most important scenes in the play, in an important moment, and is shown interacting at some length with the play's most important character. The attention then that Shakespeare lavishes upon Osric is not without a larger purpose. But, then, where does lie the significance of the character of Osric?

He lends a certain lightness of tone to the play's last sombre moments and presents a contrast to the protagonist himself. Apart from this, Osric by his presence lends a sharper focus to some of the major themes of the play. He signifies the hollow courtier which is one philosophical strand in the thought-pattern of the play, and of which Claudius is the most important icon in the play. Osric stands for the emptiness of the youth and its predilection for the pointless pursuing of current fashions in dress, conduct and behaviour. Hamlet alludes to a lack of balance between the individual merit and reward; Osric is a perfect example of it. He is a double-dealing hypocrite, has scrupulous disregard for everything that could stand in his way of "advancement."

Claudius plans a scheme for involving Hamlet in the fencing match:

> We'll put on those shall praise your excellence,
> And set a double varnish on the fame
> The Frenchman gave you, bring you, in fine, together,
> And wager o'er your heads. [Hamlet], being remiss,
> Most generous, and free from all contriving,
> Will not peruse the foils, . .
>
> [IV. vii. 1[illegible]-135]

Osric, like Laertes, is a stooge and a pawn, and a weapon in the hands of Claudius. He is the source of dread and tension—as he sets out to encourage Hamlet to lay a wager--as much as he is the source of immediate comic pleasure. Our sense of the impending disaster does not allow us to treat him merely as a source of comic relief. More than comic relief or comic pleasure he provides what has been described as "comic tension."

4.5 CLAUDIUS

After the ghost has revealed the story of the unnatural murder of the old King Hamlet, Hamlet describes Claudius as "O villain, villain, smiling villan / My

tables—meet it is I set it down / That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain." Villain in the sense of "That character in a play, whose motives or actions form an important element in the plot" [OED] is the attribute easily and most commonly associated with Claudius. Hamlet refers to Claudius again later as "Bloody, bawdy villain. / Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain." [II. ii. 608-9]. There are seven other occasions when Hamlet refers to Claudius as a villain.

Apart from the meaning that "villain" is commonly understood to have, for Shakespeare, it also meant "a low born base-minded rustic"; OED also describes "villein" to mean as "one of the class serfs in the feudal system." The two words in the Elizabethan English were interchangeable and, therefore, denoted base or bastard birth. Therefore, when Hamlet calls Claudius "A murderer and a villain" it means, "a murderer and a bastard" and not "a murderer and a wicked man." As David Berkeley points out: "Villain" is the richest, most stinging, most unsheddable curse that can be offered a king in Shakespeare's rich vocabulary of swearing. Hamlet's extreme indignation against Claudius, partly founded on his knowledge that he a true born son of a true born father must yield the throne of Denmark to a bastard "villein" cannot be reconciled with the reiteration of the relatively waterish "villain" [in the ethical sense of the word]." That each time Hamlet refers to Claudius as a bastard has far reaching implications in the play and is of singular importance and must be appreciated.

Generally, Claudius is accused of incest, hurried remarriage, murder and being a usurper of the throne of Denmark. We must remember that Hamlet's one major accusation against him is that he is a bastard. In a society to which Shakespeare belonged and which was essentially a class-ridden society, being a bastard meant a searing flaw. Shakespeare constantly invokes the images of "weed" and uses words such as "rank" and "gross" to imply "the base-born." In his first soliloquy ["that this too too sullied flesh would melt," . . . I.ii.129-159], Hamlet remarks: "Tis an *unweeded* garden, / That grows to seed, things *rank* and *gross* in nature / Possess it merely." Later in act III, he tells the queen: "And do not spread the compost on the *weeds* / To make them *ranker*." Shakespeare describes Claudius in comparison with his brother not in terms of wickedness but in terms of a bastard birth.

Hamlet draws attention to Claudius's unprepossessing appearance —"hyperion to a satyr." Hamlet asks his mother: "Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed / And batten on this *moor*?" For Shakespeare, lack of pleasant looks indicates an unethical character, while those of "gentle" birth had attractive looks. For the poet "beauty breedeth beauty" [*Venus and Adonis*, line 167]. In act III Hamlet himself is described as "the rose of the fair state" and "the mould of the from."

Claudius lacks courage: he meekly listens to Laertes accusation, "O thou vile king," and submits to Hamlet's forcing poison down his throat without much resistance. Bastards, the Elizabethans believed, had envy as their ruling passion. As Francis Bacon remarked: ". . . bastards are envious, for he that cannot possibly mend his case will do what he can to impair another's." [*Of Envy*]. Claudius's whole life appears to be a series of attemtps to "legitimise himself."

In Unit One I referred to C. P. Cavafy's version in which he recreates Claudius's character in the light of his own post-colonial pre-occupations. You might like to compare his version with the assessment of Claudius's character given above. The poem "King Claudius" is as follows:

King Claudius

My mind travels to distant parts.
I walk the streets of Elsinore,
I wander its squares, and remember
that sorrowful tale of an ill-starred king
slain by his nephew, on grounds
of certain abstract suspicions.

In all the houses of the poor
they wept for him--secretly,
for fear of Fortinbras.
A mild and peace-loving monarch
(the land had suffered much
from the campaigns of his predecessor)
he treated everyone with respect,
both great and small. He avoided
throwing his weight around, and always,
in affairs of state, sought advice
from serious, seasoned counsellors.

They never said with certainty
why it was his nephew killed him.
He suspected him of murder.
His grounds for this suspicion
were that one night, while walking
the ancient battlements, he saw,
or thought he saw, a ghost,
with whom he held a conversation.
They say the ghost made certain
allegations concerning the king.

It was just his overheated imagination,
of course, his eyes playing tricks.
(The prince was exceedingly high-strung.
As a student at Wittenburg, he was thought
quite deranged by many of his fellows.)

A few days later, he went
to see his mother about certain
family matters. Suddenly,
in mid-sentence, he lost control
and started howling, screaming
that the ghost stood there in front of him.
But his mother saw nothing.

The very same day he slew an elderly
nobleman, for no reason whatsoever.
Since in a day or two the prince
was due to sail to England, the king
did all he could to hasten his departure
and deliver him from harm.
But people were so outraged
by this brutal, senseless murder
that a rebellious mob tried to storm
the palace gates led by Laertes,
son of the victim (a bold
and ambitious youth; in the confusion,
certain of his friends shouted
"Long live King Laertes!").

When things had quieted down
and the king, thanks to his nephew,
was in his tomb (the prince
had never gone to England--
he'd skipped ship along the way),
a certain Horatio came forward
and tried to clear the prince's name
with all sorts of convoluted stories.
He said the trip to England
was justa ploy: word had been sent
to put the prince to death
(though this was never clearly proved)
He also spoke of poisoned wine,
the king's handiwork. True,
Laertes said the same thing.
But what if he was lying?
What if he'd been duped?
And when did he say it?
While dying--his mind wandering,
no idea what he was saying.
As for the poisoned swords,
it later turned out the king
had nothing to do with it,
Laertes himself put the poison there.
But when pressed, Horatio
brought in the ghost as witness.
The ghost said this, the ghost said that.
The ghost did this and that.

So while they may have listened
to what the fellow said, in private
most people mourned the goodly king,
who with phantasms and fairytales
was basely slain, and flung aside.

Fortinbras, however, who'd had
the kingship fall into his lap,
paid close attention
to every word Horatio said.

4.6 HORATIO

Horatio is generally considered an uninteresting if not a completely unimportant character in the play. He speaks some memorable lines but generally his role is expected to be a mere foil to the protagonist. But Horatio appears in nine scenes of the play compared to Ophelia's six. He speaks about half as many more lines as she does and is the most important speaker both at the beginning and at the end of the play. He delivers a long speech in act I, scene i on the preparation of war in Denmark and the long history of discord between Denmark and Norway, vividly recalls the portents of Caesar's fall and how the spirits behave. His second speech is often remembered: "A mote it is to trouble the mind's eye." He speaks minor passages of little significance until the last act when he grabs the poisoned cup from *Hamlet.*

Careful readers of the play have encountered a number of inconsistencies involving Horatio in the play. Horatio comes across to the readers as the primary source of information on the appearance of the old King Hamlet and the likeness of the ghost to him.

> *Hamlet.* Is it not like the king?
> *Horatio.* As thou art to thyself.
> Such was the very armour he had on
> When he th'ambitious Norway combated.
> So frowned he once, when in an angry parle
> He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice.
> [I. i. 63-66]

Later he remarks: "I knew your father; these hands are not more like." In reply to Hamlet, he says about the ghost's beard, Horatio says: "It was as I have seen it in his life, / A sable silver'd." Horatio thus gives the impression that Horatio knew the king personally well, at least was well acquainted with the old King Hamlet's personal appearance. But he later says, "I saw him once; a was a goodly king." Suggesting that he had not known him well enough—not well enough to account for all that he has earlier said about him. But the answer lies in not reading "I saw him once; a was a goodly king" literally to mean that he had seen the old King Hamlet only *once*. After all, "once" can also be taken to mean "when": "I saw him once; a was a goodly king" can also be read to mean that when Horatio saw him on a certain occasion, "a was a goodly king."

Hamlet addresses Horatio as a "fellow student" and therefore it is naturally assumed that both Hamlet and Horatio are about the same age. But the later elements in the play do not bear this out. We are told in the gravediggers' scene that the duel between the old King Hamlet and Fortinbas took place thirty years ago, the same year young prince Hamlet was born. So if Horatio was among those who witnessed the duel, he must be appreciably older than Hamlet. But there is no reason to be believe that fellow students, even those who are closely acquainted with each other must be of the same age group.

Yet again Horatio is presented as one who is unacquainted with the custom of accompanying royal toasts with cannonade even though he also gives the impression of having been closely familiar with the current Danish political and other matters. There is nothing in the play to suggest that Horatio came from Elsinore. He, in fact, could have come from anywhere in Denmark and may have, thus, been unfamiliar with customs of the royal court and the city life and its ways in Elsinore.

There is yet another matter involving Horatio. We discover that a month elapses between the royal funeral and the royal wedding. Horatio tells Hamlet that he had come to Elisnore for the funeral but they meet only after the royal wedding. Obviously he had remained in Elsinore for the whole month without having seen Hamlet. How is it that they did not meet during this period? But this too appears understandable in view of the fact that during this month Hamlet should have been preoccupied with the funeral of his father and political and other developments in the court.

There is little doubt that Hamlet and Horatio were friends but their friendship need not have been too close as is obvious from the fact that Hamlet uses "you" while addressing him. He uses "thou" when he addresses Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. It is only later that he starts using "thou" for Horatio. Of course, when he discovers the truth about his two friends, he uses "you" for Guildenstern in act II, scene ii. There is little doubt that Horatio matters to Shakespeare as he does to Hamlet. Shakespeare draws upon the long-standing traditon of heroes's companions which imparts much significance to such a character.

Hamlet forever addresses his friend by his name—in the second scene Hamlet addresses Horatio by his name five times in about twenty lines. Horatio is portrayed as a scholar and a sceptic. He is a man of much courage: he is not afraid to confront the ghost, though his loyalty to the prince demands that he try and dissuade him from confronting his father ghost. For Shakespeare's audience that was a dangerous enterprise.

Horatio enjoys Hamlet's trust, friendship, and confidence. More than that, Hamlet respects Horatio for some of his personal virtues:

> Horatio, thou art e'ven as just a man
> As e'er my conversation cop'd withal. . . .
>
> Nay Do not think I flatter,
> For what advancement may I hope from thee
> That no revenue hast but thy god spirits
> To feed and clothe thee? Why should be flatter'd? . . .
>
> Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice,
> And could of men distinguish her election,
> Sh'ath seal'd thee for herself: for thou has been
> As one, in suff'ring all that suffers nothing,
> A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards
> Hast ta'en with equal thanks; and blest are those
> Whose blood and judgement are so well commeddled
> That they are not a pipe for Fortune's fingure
> To sound what stop she pleases. Give me that man
> that is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
> In my heart's core, ay in my heart of heart,
> As I do thee. . . .
> [III, ii. 54-55; 56-59; 63-73]

He does come across as a "foil" to Hamlet after the play-within-the-play scene: to Hamlet's feverish questioning, he gives replies that are cool, objective and his demeanour calm. "Didst perceive?" "Very well, my lord." "Upon the talk of the poisoning?" "I did very well note him." Horatio's stoic calm is Hamlet's greatest advantage.

4.7 LET US SUM UP

There are, in addition, many aspects of the play that should be looked into. The opening scenes in the plays of Shakespeare always have a major significance. In *Hamlet* a number of other scenes must be carefully analysed for additional value; the closet scene, the nunnery scene, the prayer scene, the grave-diggers' scene, the dumb-show and the play scene, the fencing scene: these are some of the situations in the play that are imbued with meaning. Similarly, a careful analysis of the characters --other than the most important ones—Hamlet, Claudius, Getrude-- should be done. The characters of Ophelia and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern should be examined. Hamlet's character can be further studied as a scourge or purifying agent or even as a Fool. His madness, his attitude to his mother remarriage, his father's death, his attitude to his father, his character as pulled in the opposing directions of the twin forces of sentimentality and intellectualism, his divided nature, his eloquence, his romantic nature are other angles which provide useful insights into his personality. You might like to look up a reference work such as *Index to Hamlet Studies* [1990]: there are numerous entries listed under appropriate headings which would suggest various approaches to a topic. There are, in fact, hundreds of entries under the heading "Hamlet."

There are many issues that are part of the current critical debate about *Hamlet*: the question of "delay" is one of those issues. It has been on the minds of readers-theatregoers-scholars for longer than two hundred years in the history of *Hamlet* criticism. Hamlet's attitude to Ophelia is also a question that deserve a closer examination. *Hamlet* has been examined in the light of philosophical notions such as appearance and reality, or idealism versus pragmatism. The dominance in *Hamlet* of the ideas of death, decay and corruption, both of the body as well as mind and soul, has caught the readers' attention. *Hamlet* has been studied in comparison with Greek tragedies, in the context of Elizabethan culture, Elizabethan and Jacobean politics and in many other contexts such as current interest in psychoanalytical literary criticism.

Some of these issues are discussed in greater detail in many books and articles listed in the bibliography appended to the last unit.

4.8 QUESTIONS

1. What are the major themes in *Hamlet's* soliloquies?. How do they contribute to the major thematic concerns of the play?

2. Analyse "To be, or not to be" in act III, scene i, for its dramatic significance in the context of the play.

3. Analyse the role played by Osric in the larger context of the Danish politics as reflected in the play.

4. "Claudius rather than *Hamlet* is the protagonist of the play." Do you agree?