1. **Simple Explanation of Hamlet’s “ To Be or Not to Be”:**

This is the most famous soliloquy in the play. It occurs in Act (**III**) scene (**1**).

The first line and the most famous of the soliloquy raises the question : **"To be, or not to be," that is, "To live, or to die." Hamlet initially argues that death would indeed be preferable**: he compares the act of dying to a peaceful sleep: "And by a sleep to say we end / The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to." Interestingly, Hamlet poses this as a question for all of humanity rather than for only himself. He begins by asking whether it is better to passively put up with life’s pains ("the slings and arrows") or actively end it via suicide ("take arms against a sea of troubles, / And by opposing end them?").

However, **he quickly changes his tune when he considers that nobody knows for sure what happens after death**, namely whether there is an afterlife and whether this afterlife might be even worse than life. This realization is what ultimately gives Hamlet "pause" when it comes to taking action (i.e., committing suicide).

1. **Type of the Plot in Hamlet:**

Go back to your lecture to remember the **Five-Act Structure of this play** and William Shakespeare’s plays generally.

1. **Type of the Play / Why Hamlet is considered as a Tragedy:**

Hamlet is believed to be one of the very famous tragedies because it includes the features traditionally associated with this type of play. It is centered around a **basic figure**, i.e. Hamlet, who exhibits the traits of **tragic heroes** by belonging to a noble class and being exceptional in his attitudes and destiny. Hamlet faces a list of troubles which leads to his **tragic flaw and disaster**. Another feature of Hamlet as a tragedy is **its tragic ending**, or a **catastrophe** as we have seen in the class, in the sense that most of the characters face a bloody death at the end of the play. The episodes the protagonist passes through raise a host of **serious existential questions** about life, death, destiny and morality.

1. **Hamlet as a Tragic Hero:**

Tragedies are built around the actions of **exceptional heroes/characters** compared to the majority of characters. Hamlet is a **tragic hero** because he features a group of special characteristics. He is described a s a man of **high rank** socially speaking, for he is part of a **royal family** as the prince of Denmark. He is also shown as an **intelligent young** man of great **potential** **physically** and **intellectually**. Hamlet is put face to face with many external and internal **conflicts**, or **tragic events**, like the murder of his father, the marriage of his mother and the responsibility of vengeance that falls upon his shoulders. The results of this would of course be his **tragic flaw** or simply his inability to take action and **face disaster and death** because of his choice to delay the revenge.

1. **Major themes in Hamlet:**

**NB:** before talking about a certain theme, you must know the characters related to it. For example, Hamlet is not the only character who is supposed to take revenge. We have Laertes and Fortinbras also.

**a/ Revenge:**

Hamlet is very famous as a revenge tragedy. Thus, revenge is a central theme. The play’s plot centers around the young Prince Hamlet’s quest for revenge against his uncle, King Claudius, who he believes murdered his father and took the throne. Hamlet’s desire for revenge drives much of the action in the play, and ultimately leads to a tragic ending for many of the characters. Throughout the play, Hamlet struggles with his desire for revenge, questioning whether it is morally justifiable and fearing the consequences of his actions. He is torn between his duty to avenge his father’s death and his own conscience, which tells him that revenge is wrong. This internal conflict is heightened by the fact that Hamlet is a man of reason and intellect, who is able to see the flaws in his own reasoning and the consequences of his actions.

The theme of revenge is also explored through the other characters in the play. Laertes, the son of Polonius, seeks revenge against Hamlet for killing his father. His desire for revenge is more straightforward than Hamlet’s, and he is willing to go to any lengths to achieve it, even if it means sacrificing his own life.

**b/ Death and Corruption:**

**Death** is tied with the theme of revenge since it is both its cause and its consequence. Claudius’s murder of King Hamlet initiates Hamlet’s quest for revenge, and Claudius’s death is the end of that quest. The question of his own death plagues Hamlet as well, as he repeatedly contemplates whether or not suicide is a morally legitimate action in an unbearably painful world. Hamlet’s grief and misery is such that he frequently longs for death to end his suffering, but he fears that if he commits suicide, he will be consigned to eternal suffering in hell because of the Christian religion’s prohibition of suicide

# The death of King Hamlet introduces the theme of corruption as with the death of the head of the state, the rest of Denmark will fall into jeopardy with the lack of leadership. Not only does King Hamlet's death lead to a corruption of society's normal order, but he was murdered by his bother, Claudius. The presence of murder further accentuates corruption within the tragedy as it undermines the honourable and pure image of family- especially that of the royal family.

**c/ Delay:**

Hamlet’s revenge is not taken directly after the appearance of the ghost, but it is delayed for many reasons. He is obliged first to insure the guilt of Claudius because a ghost remains a ghost above all. So, herein, uncertainty is a major reason of delay. Hamlet exhibits a certain kind of intelligence when he catches Claudius on his knees praying for repenting, for if killed, the man would go to heaven, and this is something that Hamlet does not want. This incident shows also a conflict between the good and evil sides in Hamlet’s personality, and hence this is another reason of delay. A third possible reason can be seen in his forced move to England making it impossible for him to gain access to Claudius and carry out his revenge. During his trip, becomes more headstrong in his desire for revenge.

**d/ Madness:**

One of the central questions of Hamlet is whether the main character has lost his mind or is only pretending to be mad. Hamlet’s erratic behavior and nonsensical speech can be interpreted as a trick to get the other characters to believe he’s gone mad. On the other hand, his behavior may be a logical response to the “mad” situation he finds himself in – his father has been murdered by his uncle, who is now his stepfather. Initially, Hamlet himself seems to believe he’s sane – he describes his plans to “put an antic disposition on” and tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern he is only mad when the wind blows “north-north-west” – in other words, his madness is something he can turn on and off at will. By the end of the play, however, Hamlet seems to doubt his own sanity. Referring to himself in the third person, he says “And when he’s not himself does harm Laertes,” suggesting Hamlet has become estranged from his former, sane self. Referring to his murder of Polonius, he says, “Who does it then? His madness.” At the same time, Hamlet’s excuse of madness absolves him of murder, so it can also be read as the workings of a sane and cunning mind.

**e/ Action vs. Inaction:**

What separates Hamlet from other revenge plays is that the **action** we expect to see, particularly from Hamlet himself, is continually **postponed** while Hamlet tries to obtain more certain knowledge about what he is doing. Many people have seen Hamlet as a play about **indecisiveness**, and thus about Hamlet’s failure to act appropriately. It might be more interesting to consider that the play shows us how many uncertainties our lives are built upon, and how many unknown quantities are taken for granted when people act or when they evaluate one another’s actions.

**NB:**

* **Hamlet= character**
* **Hamlet= play**