"To be or not to be" Hamlet’s Greatest Performance

Purpose: To reveal the true meaning of deception behind the most famous soliloquy in the English language.

Plan:
1. To elaborate on the context of the soliloquy, placed at the core of the play.
2. To parse apart the speech, revealing elements of melodrama and feigned emotion intended for the ears of Polonius and Claudius.
3. To reveal the deeper meaning that transcends the illusory in favor of the personal meaning of Hamlet’s performance.

Thesis: In Hamlet’s philosophical soliloquy on the state of man’s position between life and death, he endeavors to bait the hidden Polonius and Claudius with his illusory drama.

I. Introduction

a. In Shakespeare’s Hamlet, the Danish Prince strings a web of deceit in which he plans to ensnare the conspirators in his father’s death.

b. Driven by an inner madness, Hamlet’s performance lies in the grey realm between clear acting and true emotional torment.

c. In Act 3, Scene 1, he remains one step ahead of his antagonists. Just as he will discover “a rat” behind a curtain in Ophelia’s chamber, he knows there presence in the great hall.

d. In Hamlet’s philosophical soliloquy on the state of man’s position between life and death, he endeavors to bait the hidden Polonius and Claudius with his illusory drama.

II. Hamlet intends for his speech to portray a false chink in his clouded mental armor.

a. “To be or not to be, that is the question”

i. The opening line is his first foray into the question of suicide.

ii. The morbid considerations of Hamlet are irresistible to Polonius and Claudius whose goal was to discover Hamlet’s mental state.

b. “The oppressors wrong... with a bare bodkin”

i. Hamlet lists characteristics associable with every character in the play, ending with himself—the “bare bodkin” wielding, “quietus” making, Hamlet.

ii. He has no reason to be describing Polonius and Claudius but does so as he is aware they are listening.

c. “The dread of something after death, the undiscovered country”

i. He is not merely talking of death itself but rather a state of limbo.

ii. This transitional state is currently occupied by his father but could soon be occupied by Polonius and Claudius as their guilt weighs heavily upon their shoulders.
III. In Hamlet, he uses a proficiency for deceit to predict the actions of his enemies and discover truths about the characters with which he maintains complex relationships.

Works Cited:


\[\sqrt{\text{like this idea — you might contrast the soliloquy as more "artifice" to his other soliloquies in your conclusion —}}\]
Hamlet's Theology

The Purpose: to analyze Shakespeare's religion and demonstrate how he incorporates it into the plot of Hamlet

Thesis: Through Hamlet's view and constant commentary on religion, William Shakespeare shows his true theology.

The Plan: to execute the purpose by presenting

1. An introduction into Shakespeare's religious beliefs and those popular during his time
2. An analysis of Hamlet's focus on sin and religion
3. The importance of the ghost in portraying Shakespeare's religious beliefs

I. Religious beliefs of England in 1602
   A. Protestantism in 1600s
      1. Queen Elizabeth
   B. Shakespeare's beliefs
      1. Protestant
   C. Differences between the two
      1. Afterlife / Heaven and Hell

II. Hamlet's Sin and Religion
   A. Not killing Claudius
      1. He will go to heaven because he is praying
   B. Constant Biblical References
      1. Excerpts from the Book of Matthew
   C. Dirt/Death Imagery
      1. Polonius's death and burial
III. The Ghost

A. Hamlet’s fascination with the ghost
   1. Afterlife?

B. Horatio’s caution of Hamlet’s following the ghost alone
   1. Devil?

Use a few more quotations—hard to define Shakespeare’s religion but easier to note his view of the “spiritual” world. A good but tricky topic!
Rough Outline: *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare

**Title:** The Neglected Ones: Women in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*

**Purpose:** To analyze how Shakespeare uses Hamlet to show how Gertrude and Ophelia are neglected and overlooked as unimportant characters when they are really the centerpiece of love and comfort in the play.

**Plan:**
1. To illustrate and introduce Gertrude and Ophelia and the roles they play as women
2. To evaluate the two women and how they are overlooked in the play
3. To compare the women to Desdemona in Shakespeare’s other work, *Othello*

**Secondary Source:** JSTOR, Painted Women: Annunciation Motifs in "Hamlet" by R. Chris Hassel Jr.

**Thesis:** In his literary masterpiece, Shakespeare utilizes Queen Gertrude and Ophelia to represent the neglect of women and how their true significance is overlooked by the male characters in the tragedy.

I. Gertrude and Ophelia’s Mistreatment
   A. Both Gertrude and Ophelia are used and neglected for a means to an end
      1. Gertrude is used by Claudius to marry into kingship
      2. Ophelia is used to discover Hamlet’s true madness
   B. “I shall obey, my lord,” (Act 1.3 line 145)
      1. Ophelia is used like a pawn in the game of Polonius and Hamlet
      2. Her naïveté lets her fall into the trap of being used as an object rather than loved as a person
   C. Shakespeare intentionally uses very few women in the play, so they can act as the traps of man
      1. Much of the play is predicated on acting, but Gertrude and Ophelia are two character who never put across a facade
   D. Thesis Statement: In his literary masterpiece, Shakespeare utilizes Queen Gertrude and Ophelia to represent the neglect of women and how their true significance is overlooked by the male characters in the tragedy.
II. The Sadness of Being Manipulated
   A. Hamlet demonstrates madness many times in the play, but he rejects Ophelia so completely that he rebukes all love for her
      1. Quotation: “If thou dost marry, I’ll give thee this plague as / for thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as / snow, thou shalt not escape calumny” (Act 3.1 lines 146-148).
      2. Sees women as corrupting of men, would rather curse Ophelia to be a virgin: irony
   B. Hamlet’s misogyny is so inflated that he accuses both women of their maleficence
      1. Hassel quotes, “Wise men know well enough / what monsters you make of them” (Act 3.1 lines 150-151) thus cuts several ways, and shows that Gertrude and Ophelia are being conflated in Hamlet’s misogynistic mind as “two breeders of sinners” (48-49).
      2. He neglects the true beauty and power of women
   C. Hamlet never forgives his mother of her treachery and ill will
      1. “No, by the rood, not so. / You are the Queen, your husband’s brother’s wife, / And (would it were not so) you are my mother” (Act 3.4 lines 19-21).
      2. Represents how women are seen as the ultimate source of evil.

III. A Comparison to Othello
   A. Ophelia and Gertrude represent Othello’s treatment of Desdemona
   B. A common theme in Shakespeare to overlook women and only focus on the bad qualities they induce.
   C. Only towards the end of the play does Hamlet relent his treatment of women when he dives into Ophelia’s grave and cries over his mother’s death
   D. Hamlet does not cherish the women in his life and they both die as a result of his actions.

Some very good points here — I like the way you find thoughtful, incisive ideas. There are some wonderful women in Shakespeare — Cleopatra, Beatrice, etc.