



Hamlet

with Dr. Junius Johnson

Lesson for Hamlet

Outline:

Dr. Junius Johnson unpacks his all-time favorite Shakespeare play by focusing on the theological tragedy in Hamlet and the notion of kingship.

- Hamlet's homecoming from studying abroad sets the stage as he attends his father's funeral and simultaneously his mother's wedding.
 - Something has already gone wrong in the play's setup in that Hamlet the younger is not automatically the king of Denmark upon his father's murder.
 - He is chided by his mother and his uncle Claudius for mourning the death of his father.
- Hamlet is left wishing he could either die or take his life if it weren't against God's decree.
 - He decides to keep his peace and accept his lot until he learns through the ghost of his father that he was murdered.
 - In the act of speaking to his father's ghost we learn of Hamlet's problem: spiritual pride and theological presumption.
 - Hamlet is convinced by the ghost of his father to avenge his death by killing Claudius, the new king of Denmark.
 - By rights of succession, Hamlet is the rightful king of Denmark with the power to properly execute Claudius.
 - Instead, he never seeks the question of justice and instead jumps to revenge but ultimately hesitates to test his mother's and uncle's guilt.
- The "play within the play" occurs when Hamlet stages a play to catch out the king's conscience.
 - He is successful and for the first time we see Claudius confronting his guilt and questioning mercy.
 - Claudius is convinced that his best hope lies in a prayer of repentance.
 - Hamlet is tempted to slay Claudius at this moment but believes he would be doing a favor in sending him to heaven absolved.
 - Hamlet's spiritual fault here lies in attempting to control the eternal destiny of a fellow creature.
 - He wants to ensure he'll go to hell.
 - This spiritual pride is the beginning of the end for Hamlet as we witness further death and deceit by his actions.
- In the end, Hamlet gives himself over to defiance and not faith.