

# EXPOS 20: WHY SHAKESPEARE?

## SESSION 5: THESIS, STRUCTURE, STAKES

### Writing Due:

- [Response Paper 1.2: Evidence and Analysis](#)

### Reading for Today:

- [Brian Chen, "Smashing the Hall of Mirrors: The Layers of Meaning in the Play within the Play of Hamlet" \(2007\)](#) [Links to an external site.](#)
- [Aphorisms on Thesis Statements](#) [Links to an external site.](#)
- [Aphorisms on Stakes](#) [Links to an external site.](#)
- [Aphorisms on Implications](#) [Links to an external site.](#)

### In-Class Discussions:

- *From Argument to Thesis:* Work backward from having an argument to having a thesis.
- *Terms:* Discuss how to use key terms in a thesis, and how to set up terms in an introduction.
- *Thesis:* Rank a series of thesis statements from best to worst, and then try to articulate what makes a thesis either good or bad.
- *Stakes/Implications:* With reference to Chen's "Smashing the Hall of Mirrors," discuss strategies for identifying what's at stake in an introduction and discussing the implications of an argument in the conclusion.
- *Structure:* As a class, create a basic outline of Chen's "Smashing the Hall of Mirrors" in preparation for our next response papers.
- *The Writing Exchange in Expos:* As an introduction to the peer-review process, which is the model for the writing exchange in Expos 20, discuss the submission history of one of Wilson's articles. Very briefly review the formal elements of the writing exchange in Expos 20: cover letters, conferences, reader's reports, workshops, comments, grades. Discuss directions for and examples of each.

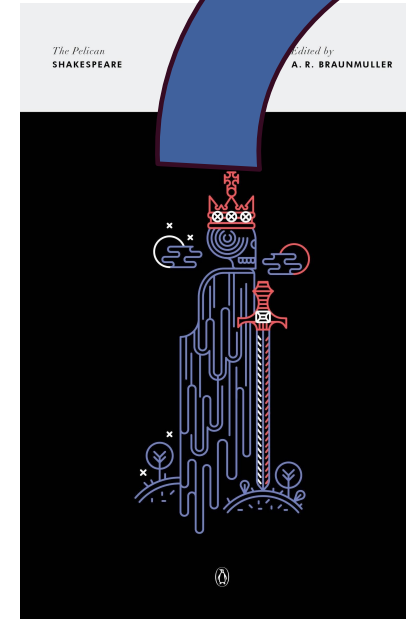
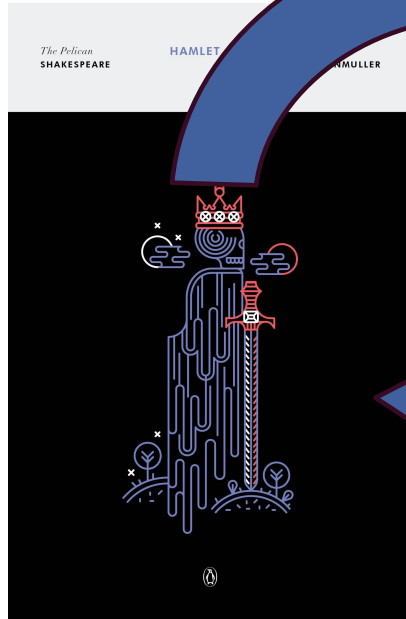
### Aphorisms (introduced in class, to be completed after class):

- [Aphorisms on Organization](#) [Links to an external site.](#)
- [Aphorisms on Organization for Close Readings](#) [Links to an external site.](#)
- [Aphorisms on Academic Publication](#) [Links to an external site.](#)

### Assignment:

- [Response Paper 1.3: A Basic Outline:](#) Draft a thesis and create a basic outline for your first paper.

# “TO BE, OR NOT TO BE’: SHAKESPEARE AGAINST PHILOSOPHY”



# HAMLET CHECK-IN

**NATIONAL**  
**SUICIDE**  
**PREVENTION**  
**LIFELINE™**  
**I-800-273-TALK**  
**I-800-273-8255**  
[www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

Printed 2005 • Reprinted 2009 • CMHS-SVPOS-0125

## 5 Action Steps for Helping Someone in Emotional Pain



**ASK**

“Are you thinking about killing yourself?”



**KEEP THEM SAFE**

Reduce access to lethal items or places.



**BE THERE**

Listen carefully and acknowledge their feelings.



**HELP THEM CONNECT**

Save the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number 1-800-273-8255.



**STAY CONNECTED**

Follow up and stay in touch after a crisis.

For more information on suicide prevention:  
[www.nimh.nih.gov/suicideprevention](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/suicideprevention)



**NIH**

National Institute of Mental Health



# FROM ARGUMENT TO THESIS



# FROM ARGUMENT TO THESIS

JEFFREY R. WILSON  
DEVELOPING YOUR ARGUMENT

**Objectives:** This activity is designed to help you develop your main argument—to see how far you can push it while adhering to the key criterion, *I believe this to be true*.

**Readings:** William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (ca. 1599)

**Instructions:**

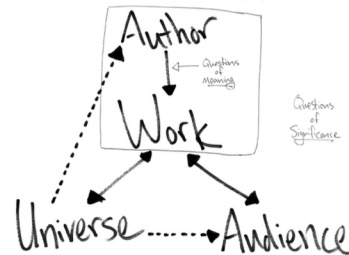
1. Using the **argument** you've developed, ask yourself, *What is the truth that I've discovered?* What is the claim you can make about the text that satisfies the criterion, *I believe this to be true*? Complete this sentence with an interpretive (not merely factual) statement that reflects **your** argument:

It is true that, in *Hamlet*,

2. You've probably described an aspect of the text. Now let's see if you can push your interpretation a little further (sometimes you can; sometimes you can't). Start by asking how that thing you just described about *Hamlet* got there. Specifically, do you think Shakespeare deliberately put it there?

Yes       No       I Don't Know

**If you said yes, answer Question 3 (a and b). If no or I don't know, answer 4 (a and b).** Our diagram of "The Total Situation of the Work of Art" may be helpful to review.





# TERMS



# TERMS

JEFFREY R. WILSON  
IDENTIFYING YOUR TERMS

**Objectives:** This activity is designed to help you identify the key terms of your main argument—the concepts that are doing a lot of work in your central claim.

**Readings:** William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (ca. 1599)

**Instructions:**

1. Read through your “argument statement” and list out the key *topics* (things you are making claims about) and *concepts* (ideas you’re using to make claims).
2. Note that the name of the text—the word “*Hamlet*”—will need to be in your list somewhere (since that’s the central topic you’re making a claim about).
3. Consider the question of authorial intent: are you making a claim about how Shakespeare wrote some aspect of *Hamlet* and why? Would you like to be making such a claim? If so, then the word “Shakespeare” will need to be in your key terms.
4. From your list, select *five* key terms—these are basically just the words that you know will definitely need to be in your thesis. (Space them out—you’ll be doing a quick conceptual map.)
5. Sometimes, writing a thesis is simply about figuring out the shortest way to articulate the relationships among your key terms. Draw in those relationships above.
  - Aim to establish links of *causality* and *chronology*: *who or what* brings *who or what* into existence?
  - Note that *motives* for doing something chronologically come before *strategies* for doing it. And *strategies* for doing something come before the actual existence of *the thing itself*. Try to establish the proper order in which your key terms come into play and act upon each other.
  - Note also that you may need to add some words to describe the nature of the relationships.
6. Using your conceptual map of your key terms, try writing out a thesis. Shorter is better. Try to do it in one sentence. The definition of good writing is: being able to convey big, important ideas in a short amount of space.

# TERMS

Every semester at the start of my Expos 20 class, *Why Shakespeare?*, students affirm the Harvard honor code, but I must admit to feeling slightly awkward when they do because, in stark contrast to life at Harvard, a code of honor is quite problematic in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Honor in *Hamlet* works like its Latin etymon, *honor*, "esteem, respect," a sense which is all about the opinions of others, something external, not any "integrity" that belongs to the individual. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, both senses of *honor* were in circulation in Shakespeare's England, the external sense of "great respect, esteem" coming into usage around 1225, and the internal sense of "a fine sense of, and strict adherence to, what is considered to be morally right or just" around 1300. But instead of "the foundation of our community" that it is at Harvard, honor is tragic in *Hamlet*. For Hamlet and Laertes, the quest to preserve the respect for their names results in catastrophe for themselves, their families, and the nation.

# TERMS

Question/Problem: Every semester at the start of my Expos 20 class, *Why Shakespeare?*, students affirm the Harvard honor code, but I must admit to feeling slightly awkward when they do because, in stark contrast to life at Harvard, a code of honor is quite problematic in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Terms: Honor in *Hamlet* works like its Latin etymon, *honor*, "esteem, respect," a sense which is all about the opinions of others, something external, not any "integrity" that belongs to the individual. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, both senses of *honor* were in circulation in Shakespeare's England, the external sense of "great respect, esteem" coming into usage around 1225, and the internal sense of "a fine sense of, and strict adherence to, what is considered to be morally right or just" around 1300.

Thesis: But instead of "the foundation of our community" that it is at Harvard, honor is tragic in *Hamlet*. For Hamlet and Laertes, the quest to preserve the respect for their names results in catastrophe for themselves, their families, and the nation.

# TERMS

- Two main ways to establish terms:
  - Defining
    1. Self-definition: “By irony, I mean...”
    2. Dictionary Definition: “The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives 1566 as the first instance of *irony* meaning...”
    3. Etymology: “The English word *irony* comes from the Greek *eiron*, meaning...”
    4. Theoretical Citation: “Richard Rorty defines *irony* as...”
  - Discussing
    1. Establish not the meaning but the significance of a term.
    2. Create distinctions and contrasts.

# TERMS

- In essays
  - Establish key terms before thesis (usually but not always).
  - Then use terms in thesis.
  - BUT sometimes a thesis can be the creation of a new term (so you'd discuss the term after the thesis).
  - Or your implications can develop a new theory and give it a name.
- In research papers:
  - Draw your terms from your contextual sources (historical evidence and citational evidence).
  - Use terms to establish lines of argument or critical camps.



# THESIS



# THESIS

## ESSAY 1 DRAFT

Chris

### The Artistic Components of "Snake"

[1] Some of the greatest poetry of all time has resulted from confrontations between man and nature, and D.H. Lawrence's poem "Snake" is no exception. While he was in Taormina, Sicily, Lawrence had a confrontation with a poisonous snake. He felt regretful about the outcome of the confrontation and as a result wrote his famous poem about it. It is the skillful interplay of three factors in particular--mood, symbolism, and allusion--that makes this such an effective piece.

[2] One thing that makes "Snake" especially vivid is the dominant mood of drowsiness. It is a hot and drowsy day, hot enough that a snake will risk appearing at a human house and so hot that the smells of the carob tree are in the air. The snake appears and moves very slowly. The long lines of Lawrence's poem help create this slow movement, and so do the many repeated words. There are also many prepositions in Lawrence's description, and these make the reader's mind move along with the snake. The snake is described as dreaming and vague--like cattle [[strange comparison]] and as musing--a very slow action). When the snake goes back after drinking: it moves "slowly, very slowly" and is again dreaming "thrice adream" [[at three removes from being awake?]].

## ESSAY 1 REVISION

Chris

### Missing his Chance: The Real Story in D.H. Lawrence's "Snake"

[1] While he was living in Taormina, Sicily, D. H. Lawrence had a confrontation with a poisonous snake and wrote his famous poem about it. When the golden snake emerges to get a drink of water at the fountain, on a burning hot day, Lawrence at first watches it with fascination and feels honored, but eventually he hears the "the voices of my education" and throws a log at it--a petty act he regrets at the end of the poem: "I missed my chance with one of the lords of life." In this summary, the poem tells a story familiar to readers in our age of environmentalism and bio-diversity. It tells how humanity's relationship with nature is governed by our desire for power and control, which has led us to exterminate or drive away animals that threaten our progress or convenience, rather than appreciate our rare chances to observe them. But although there are indeed elements of such a criticism of humans in the poem, to take it as Lawrence's message is to miss the stress he places on the otherness of the snake and on the inner weakness of himself.<sup>1</sup>

[2] Admittedly, the lines that appear to be the moral of Lawrence's story, in which he condemns "the voices of my accursed human education," seem to suggest a criticism of humanity and an education system that teaches how to master nature. The theme of man mastering nature is implied in opening scene when Lawrence mentions a water

# THESIS

JEFFREY R. WILSON  
WRITING GOOD THESIS STATEMENTS

**Objectives:** This activity is designed to help students understand the features of a good thesis statement.

**Readings:** William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (ca. 1599)

**Instructions:**

1. On the back of this sheet are a number of thesis statements about *Hamlet*. Read through these thesis statements. Mark which ones you think are the best and which ones you think are the worst.
2. In a small group of three or four, rank what your group sees as the top three thesis statements and the bottom three. Discuss why you like or don't like the statements you've ranked. What are these thesis statements doing that you like or don't like. Additionally, what open questions do you have about writing a thesis statement ("When writing a thesis, should we do X or Y?")
3. Coming back together as a class, list out the thesis statements people tended to like and dislike. Discuss why these statements are successful or not. Most importantly, start to list out the features of good vs. bad thesis statements.
4. With the features of a good thesis statement in mind, take a shot at writing out your own thesis statement for your first essay, as it currently stands.

JEFFREY R. WILSON  
WRITING GOOD THESIS STATEMENTS

1. Shakespeare prompts questions about succession in *Hamlet*, and deliberately doesn't answer them.
2. As illustrated in this essay, Shakespeare's Denmark is rampant with religious hypocrisy; characters use religion to legitimate their actions much more than they use religion to determine what those actions should be.
3. Shakespeare showed the tragic power of disappointment and anger by having the Ghost of King Hamlet produce a wildly perverse punishment for his widow: the Ghost prevents Hamlet from punishing his mother, not out of love, but out of a desire to see her punish herself (through her tortured conscience) and indeed to see heaven punish her (by sending her to hell).
4. Is it possible then that Hamlet is both suffering from a subtle madness that strengthens throughout the duration of the play, and is still clever enough most of the time to feign an outrageous madness to lead Claudius, Polonius, and Gertrude away from his true thoughts?
5. In this essay, I contend that Fortinbras honors Hamlet, not out of any genuine admiration, but rather to consolidate political power.
6. Hamlet has two audiences that he's performing for, and his humor means two different things to these two different audiences: it means "madness" to the other characters on stage, but it means "intelligence" to us in the audience.
7. As long as Hamlet is lost in the world of acting, he cannot ~~take action~~.
8. Shakespeare uses imagery of the bestial and the divine as a characterization of Hamlet's suspension between action and inaction. In this way, Shakespeare asserts that action stems from impulsive, bestial instincts while inaction demonstrates a divine wisdom and reasoning.
9. Shakespeare uses this interesting scene construction to show drama's effect on a guilty mind. Though what is even more intriguing is his use of it twice.
10. In this essay, I argue that Shakespeare has set a conflict between logic and emotion in the conscience. He uses the royal family—Claudius, Hamlet, and Gertrude—to demonstrate different types of conscience and their influences.
11. Hamlet must know for a fact that he is not killing Claudius behind the curtain and that it must in fact be Polonius.
12. Although Hamlet and Claudius live and die as enemies, they display more similarities in character than their opposing circumstances suggest. That is, Hamlet's resemblance to Claudius detracts from the prince's credibility as the faultless hero, and Claudius's resemblance to Hamlet casts doubt upon the king's role as the ruthless villain.
13. Though Ophelia is ~~molested~~ by superficiality – she even claimed that "beauty had better commerce with honesty" (3.1.109) than anything else – she is a victim of society as a whole, more specifically of Claudius' and Polonius' manipulation, Hamlet's frustration, and the human "flesh" (3.1.62) to which she is heir, making her minimally accountable for her own fate.
14. I want to suggest that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* includes a radical feminist critique of misogyny. It does so by depicting overbearing men controlling their wives and daughters, sure, but even more tragically by showing those women internalize the misogyny they experience and redirect it toward other women.
15. Shakespeare, wishing to unmask the mental disarray that befalls and temporarily immobilizes every future murderer, illustrates this circuitous process of coming to terms with murder through Hamlet's changing his conception of death from a state of eternal repose under the aegis of salvation to one of perdition, and finally, to one primarily characterized by the corruption and befoolment of the physical body.
16. Rather than "revenge" his father's murder, Hamlet chooses to "remember" him by means of impersonation. His tribute does not succeed on its own terms and in fact brings him closer to his uncle than his father.

# THESIS

## What To Do

- True
- Clear
- Consequential
- Not obvious
- Quotable / Detachable
- Big and bold: pushed as far as possible while maintaining, *I believe this to be true.*
- Make one (and only one) central claims, though it may have several parts.
- Direct: no fluff.
- Use key terms.
- Not too short, not too long.
- Analytical, not ethical or political.
- Answer the driving question/problem of the essay.
- Explain how and why something came into existence.
- Use “by” to indicate how something came into existence (Y is true; X did Y by Z).
- Use “because” to indicate rationale (X is true because Y and Z).
- About author’s intent?
- Include a tag?

## What Not To Do

- Write something that’s not true.
- Write a multi-factorial thesis.
- Write a moralistic thesis.
- Use thought-terminating clichés (“truth,” “reality,” “human nature”)
- Be suggestive, coy, or vague.
- Be cute or clever.
- Be too short.
- Be too long.
- Ask a question instead of giving an answer/explanation.
- Rely to much on the surrounding writing for the thesis to make sense.
- Quote in the thesis.

# THESIS

My Top Five Strategies for Thesis Statements:

1. Truth Claim / Explanation
2. Surface Reading / Closer Reading
3. Not X but Y
4. Use Key Terms
5. Less is More

# THESIS

But instead of “the foundation of our community” that it is at Harvard, honor is tragic in *Hamlet*. For Hamlet and Laertes, the quest to preserve the respect for their names results in catastrophe for themselves, their families, and the nation.

- Not X (“instead of ‘the foundation of our community’ that it is at Harvard”) but Y (“honor is tragic in *Hamlet*”)
- Truth Claim (“honor is tragic in *Hamlet*”) / Explanation (“For Hamlet and Laertes, the quest to preserve...”)

# THESIS

I think Shakespeare answered the question of Ophelia's moral agency in an unexpected way: through the imagery of music in *Hamlet*, including the songs she sings just before her death.

- Tag (“I think”)
- Short, Direct: Less is More (30 words)
- About Author's intent (“Shakespeare answered”)
- Literary (“the imagery of music”)

# THESIS

I want to suggest that Shakespeare did not care about the questions of metaphysical philosophy, and that he satirized metaphysics in Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" speech because he thought acting was more important than being. That is, Shakespeare valued human action and interaction, including the social roles we perform like actors playing characters on a stage, over abstract knowledge about existence generated through theoretical reasoning

- Tag ("I want to suggest")
- Uses Key Terms ("metaphysics"; "acting" vs. "being")
- Not X ("Shakespeare did not care about the questions of metaphysical philosophy") but Y ("he satirised metaphysics")
- Literary ("he satirized")
- About Author's Intent ("he satirized ... because he thought"; "Shakespeare valued...")
- Truth Claim ("he satirized metaphysics in Hamlet's 'To be, or not to be' speech") / Explanation ("Shakespeare valued human action and interaction...")

# THESIS

As in society today, suicide is contagious in *Hamlet*, at least in the example of Ophelia, the only death by suicide in the play, because she only becomes suicidal after hearing Hamlet talk about his own suicidal thoughts in “To be, or not to be.”

- Short, Direct: Less is More (45 words)
- Big Consequential Statement
- Truth Claim (“suicide is contagious in *Hamlet*”) / Explanation (“at least in the example of Ophelia...”)

# THESIS

As illustrated in this essay, *Hamlet* is not misogynistic in the sense that it promotes the superiority of men and the inferiority of women. In fact, *Hamlet* critiques misogyny and patriarchy by configuring them with tragedy, yet the Shakespeare who wrote *Hamlet* still held an unconscious bias against women. In other words, *Hamlet* exhibits a structural sexism that is different from and more difficult to discern than the overt sexism of misogyny and patriarchy.

- Tag (“As illustrated in this essay”)
- Not X (“*Hamlet* is not misogynistic...”) but Y (“the Shakespeare who wrote *Hamlet* still held an unconscious bias against women”)
- Uses Key Terms (“misogyny” and “patriarchy” vs. “unconscious bias”)
- Truth Claim (“the Shakespeare who wrote *Hamlet* still held an unconscious bias against women”) / Explanation (“*Hamlet* exhibits a structural sexism that is...”)

# THESIS

JEFFREY R. WILSON  
WRITING GOOD THESIS STATEMENTS

**Objectives:** This activity is designed to help students understand the features of a good thesis statement.

**Readings:** William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (ca. 1599)

**Instructions:**

1. On the back of this sheet are a number of thesis statements about *Hamlet*. Read through these thesis statements. Mark which ones you think are the best and which ones you think are the worst.
2. In a small group of three or four, rank what your group sees as the top three thesis statements and the bottom three. Discuss why you like or don't like the statements you've ranked. What are these thesis statements doing that you like or don't like? Additionally, what open questions do you have about writing a thesis statement ("When writing a thesis, should we do X or Y?")
3. Coming back together as a class, list out the thesis statements people tended to like and dislike. Discuss why these statements are successful or not. Most importantly, start to list out the features of good vs. bad thesis statements.
4. With the features of a good thesis statement in mind, take a shot at writing out your own thesis statement for your first essay, as it currently stands.

JEFFREY R. WILSON  
WRITING GOOD THESIS STATEMENTS

1. Shakespeare prompts questions about succession in *Hamlet*, and deliberately doesn't answer them.
2. As illustrated in this essay, Shakespeare's Denmark is rampant with religious hypocrisy; characters use religion to legitimate their actions much more than they use religion to determine what those actions should be.
3. Shakespeare showed the tragic power of disappointment and anger by having the Ghost of King Hamlet produce a wildly perverse punishment for his widow: the Ghost prevents Hamlet from punishing his mother, not out of love, but out of a desire to see her punish herself (through her tortured conscience) and indeed to see heaven punish her (by sending her to hell).
4. Is it possible then that Hamlet is both suffering from a subtle madness that strengthens throughout the duration of the play, and is still clever enough most of the time to feign an outrageous madness to lead Claudius, Polonius, and Gertrude away from his true thoughts?
5. In this essay, I contend that Fortinbras honors Hamlet, not out of any genuine admiration, but rather to consolidate political power.
6. Hamlet has two audiences that he's performing for, and his humor means two different things to these two different audiences: it means "madness" to the other characters on stage, but it means "intelligence" to us in the audience.
7. As long as Hamlet is lost in the world of acting, he cannot ~~take action~~.
8. Shakespeare uses imagery of the bestial and the divine as a characterization of Hamlet's suspension between action and inaction. In this way, Shakespeare asserts that action stems from impulsive, bestial instincts while inaction demonstrates a divine wisdom and reasoning.
9. Shakespeare uses this interesting scene construction to show drama's effect on a guilty mind. Though what is even more intriguing is his use of it twice.
10. In this essay, I argue that Shakespeare has set a conflict between logic and emotion in the conscience. He uses the royal family—Claudius, Hamlet, and Gertrude—to demonstrate different types of conscience and their influences.
11. Hamlet must know for a fact that he is not killing Claudius behind the curtain and that it must in fact be Polonius.
12. Although Hamlet and Claudius live and die as enemies, they display more similarities in character than their opposing circumstances suggest. That is, Hamlet's resemblance to Claudius detracts from the prince's credibility as the faultless hero, and Claudius's resemblance to Hamlet casts doubt upon the king's role as the ruthless villain.
13. Though Ophelia is ~~molested~~ by superficiality – she even claimed that "beauty had better commerce with honesty" (3.1.109) than anything else – she is a victim of society as a whole, more specifically of Claudius' and Polonius' manipulation, Hamlet's frustration, and the human "flesh" (3.1.62) to which she is heir, making her minimally accountable for her own fate.
14. I want to suggest that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* includes a radical feminist critique of misogyny. It does so by depicting overbearing men controlling their wives and daughters, sure, but even more tragically by showing those women internalize the misogyny they experience and redirect it toward other women.
15. Shakespeare, wishing to unmask the mental disarray that befalls and temporarily immobilizes every future murderer, illustrates this circuitous process of coming to terms with murder through Hamlet's changing his conception of death from a state of eternal repose under the aegis of salvation to one of perdition, and finally, to one primarily characterized by the corruption and befoolment of the physical body.
16. Rather than "revenge" his father's murder, Hamlet chooses to "remember" him by means of impersonation. His tribute does not succeed on its own terms and in fact brings him closer to his uncle than his father.



# IMPLICATIONS

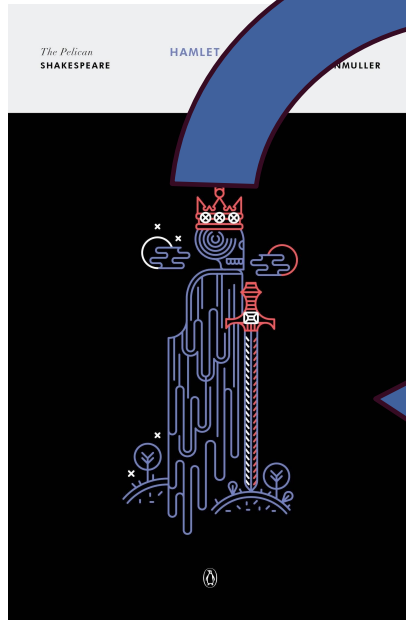


# IMPLICATIONS

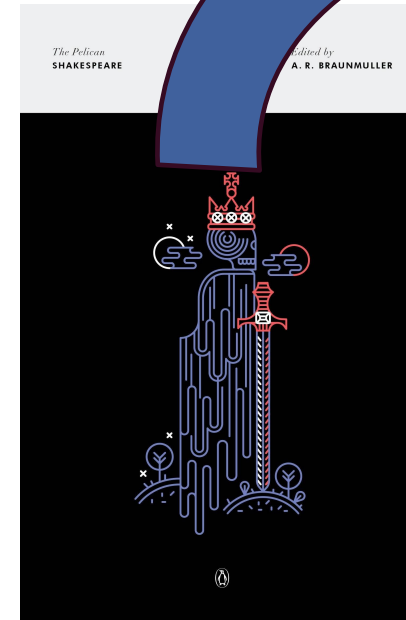
- What's the pay-off?
- Generalizable knowledge.
- So what? Who cares? Why does it matter? What does this change?
- Expand your scope.
- *Argument* is about your text. *Implications* go beyond your text.
- Don't try to be all things to all people.
- Addressed to academics working in a distinct scholarly field.

# IMPLICATIONS

## A Close Reading



## A Theorization



# IMPLICATIONS

But instead of “the foundation of our community” that it is at Harvard, honor is tragic in *Hamlet*. For Hamlet and Laertes, the quest to preserve the respect for their names results in catastrophe for themselves, their families, and the nation.

## A Close Reading

The catastrophe in *Hamlet* does not come about due to some individual flaw or mistake, as happens in most classical tragedy. By making the culture of honor the cause of catastrophe in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare shifted the site of the tragic flaw from the individual to the culture.

## A Theorization

Taken in the context of the Honor Code at Harvard, Shakespeare’s treatment of honor as tragic in *Hamlet* allows us to theorize the difference between two different kinds of honor: heroic honor and tragic honor.

# IMPLICATIONS

Does your argument suggest something about:

- Larger themes/questions in *Hamlet*?
- The way Shakespeare created art?
- What Shakespeare seems to have thought?
- How the text should be performed?
- Life today (which is very different than offering “life lessons”)?
- The best way to understand some modern idea or current event?

# IMPLICATIONS

Some strategies for conclusions (don't try to do all or even more than one; pick a single approach and develop it in depth).:

- What are the policy implications that follow—i.e., how some institution should enact rules?
- Are there common misconceptions that your argument challenges?
- What are the lingering questions that need further thought or research?
- Are you able to theorize outward? To create a model for evidence you haven't analyzed in depth?
- Can you offer a concluding example that “brings it home” in a concrete way?
- Is there another turn of the screw in your argument that might surprise readers?

# IMPLICATIONS

JEFFREY R. WILSON  
DEVELOPING IMPLICATIONS

**Objectives:** This activity is designed to help students move from having an argument to understanding what's at stake in that argument.

**Readings:** William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (ca. 1599)

**Instructions:**

1. Thinking about your argument, how could you use it to comment on:
  - a) one of the larger themes/questions in *Hamlet*?
  - b) the way Shakespeare created art?
  - c) what Shakespeare seems to have believed?
  - d) how the text should be performed?
  - e) life today (which is very different than offering "life lessons")?
  - f) the best way to understand some modern idea or current event?
2. If someone accepts your argument as true:
  - a) What are the policy implications that follow—i.e., the standards and rules that should be adopted by some institution that has some power over matters related to your topic?
  - b) What are the common ideas that your argument challenges?
  - c) What are the lingering questions that need further thought or research?
  - d) How might you create a theory out of your argument—i.e., an abstract model with the power to explain additional examples that you haven't covered?
  - e) How does your argument help us understand the end of the play?



# STAKES



# STAKES

## Question/Problem<sub>1</sub>

- What got you thinking about your topic in the first place.
- The question/problem posed in your first response paper.
- The issue in your “text” (the thing you’re interpreting) that needs interpretation.
- Related to your argument.

## Question/Problem<sub>2</sub>

- The question you now have an answer to.
- A question/problem you may not have been asking, but can now answer.
- The issue outside your narrowly defined “text” (even if it’s still something about *Hamlet*) illuminated by your interpretation.
- A bigger question related to the discipline/field you’re writing in.
- Related to your stakes and implications.

# STAKES

- In the introduction.
- Identifies the topic of your conclusion.
- A preview of your implications.
- *Thesis Statement :Argument :: Stakes : Implications*
- How your response to the question/problem in your text—i.e., how your argument—has consequences beyond that particular text.
- Indicate the field you're making a contribution to.
- Don't overdo it: less is more.
- One sentence, a few, or a short paragraph.
- The best place to identify what's at stake is often either the very start of your essay or at the end of the introduction.

# STAKES

JEFFREY R. WILSON  
SETTING THE STAKES

**Objectives:** This activity is designed to help students move from having an argument to understanding what's at stake in that argument.

**Readings:** William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (ca. 1599)

**Instructions:**

1. Thinking about your *implications*, determine whether you envision your essay as a *close reading* (which unpacks some small aspect of Shakespeare's Hamlet in an effort to enhance our understanding of the totality of Shakespeare's play) or a *theorization* (which unpacks something about Shakespeare's Hamlet in an effort to comment on some idea or issue outside of Shakespeare's play)?

A Close Reading

A Theorization

2. Based on whether you envision your essay as a *close reading* or a *theorization*, identify the academic discipline to which you're making a *contribution* with this essay. A discipline is a broad field of knowledge, the kind of thing you identify when you identify your concentration. (If you're doing a close reading, you're working in Literary Studies. If you're doing a theorization, you might be working in, e.g., Psychology, Environmental Science, Women's Studies, etc.)
3. Identify the field or line of thought within that discipline that you envision yourself making a *contribution* to (e.g., in Literary Studies, it could be Shakespeare studies, or tragedy studies; in Psychology, it could be studies of unconscious bias).
4. Now note that the *question/problem* that would be answered by your *implications* may not be the same as the *question/problem* that got you thinking about this argument in the first place (i.e., the question/problem posed in your first response paper). **Working backwards from your implications, identify the question/problem you now have an answer to.** This will probably be a bigger question related to the discipline/field in which you're writing, as opposed to the smaller, more local question you earlier posed which grew out of your analysis of Shakespeare's play. For the sake of clarity, it may be helpful to distinguish between a *Question<sub>1</sub>* (which is related to your *text* and *argument*: the issue in the text that needs interpretation) and a *Question<sub>2</sub>* (which is related to your *stakes* and *implications*: the issue outside your narrowly defined "text" illuminated by your interpretation).

*Question<sub>1</sub>* (answered by your *argument*):

*Question<sub>2</sub>* (answered by your *implications*):



# STRUCTURE



# STRUCTURE

## Introduction

- Orientation (Macro)
- Question/Problem
- Terms
- Thesis
- Stakes

## Body

- Orientation (Micro)
- Evidence
- Analysis
- Counters/Responses to Analyses
- Building up to Argument

## Conclusion

- Counter/Response to Argument
- Argument
- Implications

# STRUCTURE

## Introduction

- Question/Problem Statement
  - *Orientation (Evidence, Analysis):* “Play within the Play”
  - *Question/Problem:* Play within play undermines purpose of playing
- Thesis Statement
  - *Stakes:* Connection between questions of drama and of life in *Hamlet*
  - *Thesis:* In *Hamlet*, drama and life are meaningless, but meaninglessness is inconsequential.

## Body

- I. The Futility of Drama
  - i. The Inanity of Dramatic Audiences in Act II
    - Ev.: Polonius
    - Ev.: Hamlet
  - ii. The Boorishness of Dramatic Performance in *The Mousetrap*
    - Ev.: Hamlet’s Commentary
  - iii. Hamlet on the Futility of Drama
    - Ev.: “Hecuba” Passage
2. The Futility of Life
  - i. Hamlet on the Meaninglessness of Life
    - Ev.: Yorick
    - Ev.: “To be or not to be”
  - ii. The Meaningfulness of Actions
    - Ev.: Hamlet
    - Ev.: Shakespeare

## Conclusion

- Argument Paragraph: Second-Order Nihilism
- Implications Paragraph
  - Counter: Third-Order Nihilism?
  - Response: No further nihilisms!
  - Implications: Second-order nihilism points outside the dramatic illusion of *Hamlet* toward the historical reality of Shakespeare.

# STRUCTURE

## A Close Reading

### Introduction

- Orientation to *Question/Problem<sub>1</sub>*
- *Question/Problem<sub>1</sub>*
- *Text*
- *Terms*
- *Thesis*
- *Stakes* (i.e., *Question/Problem<sub>2</sub>*, including any needed *Orientation*)

### Body

- Divided into sections, some sections into multiple paragraphs
- *Orientation, Evidence, Analysis, Counters/Responses to Analyses, Leading to Argument*

### Conclusion

- *Counter/Response to Argument*
- *Argument*
- *Implications* (including any needed *Orientation*)

## A Theorization

### Introduction

- Orientation to *Question/Problem<sub>2</sub>*
- *Stakes* (i.e., *Question/Problem<sub>2</sub>*)
- *Text / Method*
- *Terms*
- *Thesis*

### Body

- Orientation to *Question/Problem<sub>1</sub>*
- *Question/Problem<sub>1</sub>*
- Divided into sections, some sections into multiple paragraphs
- *Orientation, Evidence, Analysis, Counters/Responses to Analyses, Leading to Argument*

### Conclusion

- *Counter/Response to Argument*
- *Argument*
- *Implications* (including any needed *Orientation*)

# STRUCTURE

JEFFREY R. WILSON  
PLANNING YOUR STRUCTURE

**Objectives:** This activity is designed to help you plan the structure of a single-source essay.

**Readings:** William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (ca. 1599)

**Instructions:** Based on whether you see yourself doing a *close reading* (on this side) or a *theorization* (on the back), sketch out a possible structure for your first essay. Keep in mind that these are models—possibilities—not rules, and certainly not absolutes. There are many legitimate reasons for doing things differently, and you'll have to think about the specifics of your argument and how it should be structured. Some of our most memorable writing moments come from deliberate breaking of the conventions of academic writing. At the same time, these models can be helpful for thinking through the best sequence in which to present ideas.

## A Close Reading

### Introduction

- Orientation to *Question/Problem*,
- *Question/Problem*,
- *Text*
- *Terms*
- *Thesis*
- *Stakes* (i.e., *Question/Problem*, including any needed *Orientation*)

### Body

- Divided into sections, some sections into multiple paragraphs
- *Orientation, Evidence, Analysis, Counters/Responses to Analyses, Leading to Argument*

### Conclusion

- *Counter/Response to Argument*
- *Argument*
- *Implications* (including any needed *Orientation*)



# THE WRITING EXCHANGE IN EXPOS



# THE WRITING EXCHANGE IN EXPOS

From: [REDACTED]  
Subject: British Journal for the History of Philosophy - Decision on Manuscript ID BJHP-2015-0253  
Date: December 14, 2015 at 5:34 AM  
To: [REDACTED]



14-Dec-2015

Dear Dr Wilson,

Two referees have now considered your paper but I am sorry to say that in the light of them, we have decided not to pursue it further for publication in the British Journal for the History of Philosophy. The referee comments are included at the bottom of this letter, along with those of the editor who coordinated the review of your paper. I hope you will find them to be constructive and helpful. You are of course now free to submit the paper elsewhere should you choose to do so.

Thank you for considering the British Journal for the History of Philosophy.

With best wishes,

[REDACTED]  
Editor, British Journal for the History of Philosophy

Referees' Comments to Author:

Referee: 1

This essay attempts to persuade its readers that Hamlet's "to be or not to be" speech is, despite the seriousness with which it is usually acted and read, in truth, a satire of philosophy. To look for profundities within its words is thus empty, and misses the point: Hamlet's mockery of philosophy, philosophy as theatrically – a pose.

While the argument being advanced is a provocative and iconoclastic one, I do not recommend publishing this essay. It simply failed to persuade this reader that a viable interpretative possibility worthy of contemplation is being offered. The reading is forced as a literary interpretation. As a reading of a dramatic text, that is, a text designed to be performed, it fares even worse. I have not seen a performance of the speech which gravitates towards the option advocated by the author, nor does the author help me visualize what such a performance would look like. A Hamlet who turns these words into part of pretended madness weakens them for the audience. When elsewhere in the play Hamlet feigns madness, he is over the top and trying to get the audience to laugh. Surely not the intended effect here.

What I think the author is genuinely picking out, is that Hamlet's philosophizing (and not just here) is more of an evasion of the personal than a full-blooded philosophical streak. There is an insouciant aura radiating from Hamlet's philosophical flights. They are never cerebral, but the energy is unrelated to feeling for this or that asserted philosophical abstraction, but to recoil – sometimes in anger, sometimes in disgust - from something. Yet moving from this to perceiving Hamlet's philosophizing as a parody is too much of a leap, and the author has not convinced me that this leap can be plausibly taken.

More specific points:

- The analysis of the soliloquy begins with what is presented as a puzzle. Why does Hamlet describe death as the undiscovered country from which no traveler returns after he had just encountered his father's ghost? That encounter should have blocked describing death in such terms – that's the puzzle. The author assumes that because we cannot attribute to Shakespeare or to Hamlet more longfulness of the ghost, the hint is that Hamlet's words are not to be taken at face value. Hamlet is mocking or critiquing something/someone.

- The problem with this argument relates to theological context: if the line is read against a Catholic (purgatory/hell) framing, Hamlet's line isn't puzzling at all: a ghost can return from purgatory but not from hell; we can hear what purgatory is like, but can know nothing about hell/death. If, alternatively, a Protestant framing is imposed on the line, Hamlet's line is also not puzzling but for a different reason: the ghost is a demon in disguise or a figment of the imagination (not something coming back from purgatory), and death really is the place from which none return. In both frameworks it is thus consistent to believe that one is encountering a ghost, and that no one returns from the dead.

- He has Ophelia to his left, who must be wondering what on earth Hamlet is talking about. (p. 5) – she is not just standing there gazing at him in disbelief. She is staged as praying (if Hamlet greets her by asking that she remember his sins in her prayers, and Polonius has asked her to read a book). It is also curious to imagine how Hamlet can deliver the speech if she is looking at him.

- "While it seems to be a suffering man's account of the battle between action and contemplation..." – I don't see how the speech can seem to mean this. The speech is about the choice between living (thereby suffering all that life can dish out) and actively ending life. Not between acting and contemplating (in pages 15-16, there is a clarification that such is what the author has in mind, but the initial phrasing here is confusing). The paragraph directly above this one contains errors of spelling (Branagh), Greek, and philosophical classification (for most philosophers, questions of truth are epistemological, not ontological)

- "Hamlet's suggestion that he can put on madness, like a coat, signals a shift in his concerns from the internal to the external, from being to seeming. In this moment, therefore, he changes from an ontologist concerned with reality to an actor concerned with appearances." – I don't see this: when Hamlet begins pretending, this does not mean that he is no longer "concerned with reality". On the contrary, his mask is a means for him to access truth. He remains a realist, convinced that there is a truth to be known. (8) See, too, his final words to Horatio, a wish for his true story to be told.

- "Hamlet is acting here. He is not mad; he is acting mad." – while Hamlet presents his madness as an act, the extent to which the act is controlled by him and does not morph into actual madness has been debated. Good to indicate awareness of the issue.

- "When Hamlet delivers his famous speech, Claudius is watching him. And Hamlet knows that Claudius is watching him. Claudius

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have told Claudius that Hamlet knows that he is being watched, Claudius knows that Hamlet knows that Claudius is watching him." (p. 13) – Seems strained and extremely awkward to stage the scene in such a way. Branagh's film hints that Hamlet knows he is overheard, but even there this remains a possibility, the viewers unsure about who knows what.

- "The fact that Hamlet uses these two approaches, philosophy and misogyny, to indicate his madness allows us to consider the possibility that philosophy, so often seen as the height of brilliance and goodness, is just as repugnant as misogyny, and that both are madness." (15-16) Either the logic behind this sentence is that if a mad person says X, then X is an instance/watermark of madness, or, if someone sets out to pretend to be mad and chooses to say X, and if X is an instance of a position/discipline Y, it is implied that Y is part of madness. Both are fallacious.

- "To be, or not to be" recycles Hamlet's earlier soliloquies. (p. 17) – It does not recycle these: the previous suicide speech mentioned suicide, but seemed to take seriously its religious prohibition. In the "to be/not to be" speech, suicide is avoided due to fear. The reasons leading to the suicidal wish have also transformed: in the first case, it was his mother's trivialization of his father's death by her swift marriage; in the later speech, it is the endless suffering of the evil done by others. (the author later asserts that the discovery of Hamlet's father's murder cannot lead to suicidal thoughts but to action – revenge – but Hamlet's entire originality for many readers is his questioning of revenge and underscoring its futility, hence suicide surfaces as an option at this point)

- I don't see the point of the section in page 17, in which the author suggests moving round bits and pieces of the play. Sounds suspiciously like changing the aesthetic facts to suit the theory. The author should, rather, use the present order as a counter example to his/her reading, and ask what point is achieved by Shakespeare's chosen order.

- Throughout much of the discussion, I miss a distinction between performing and pretending. Hamlet, the author says, is doing the latter; but only under a very crude understanding of theatrical performance does the latter simply equal the former; performing is not the same as pretending.

Referee: 2

Please see attached.

Editor's Comments to Author:

Associate Editor

I hope the comments, including the more critical ones, will be of use to you, but perhaps the paper, as the second reviewer suggests,



is better suited to another journal. Shakespeare Agains...rs.pdf

# THE WRITING EXCHANGE IN EXPOS

”To be, or not to be’: Shakespeare Against Philosophy” (Submission History):

- *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* (Dec. 2015)
  - “It simply failed to persuade this reader that a viable interpretative possibility worthy of contemplation is being offered.”
  - “What I think the author is genuinely picking out, is that Hamlet’s philosophizing (and not just here) is more of an evasion of the personal than a full-blooded philosophical streak.”
  - “It doesn’t contribute anything of real substance.”
  - “Smollett thought it, despite the admiration accorded it, ‘a heap of absurdities, whether we consider the situation, the sentiment, the argumentation, or the poetry’”
- *Renaissance Drama* (Nov. 2016)”
  - “Hard to follow even as an essay in the tradition of Montaigne or Barthes.”
  - “it is just too long.”
  - “For the relationship between philosophy and drama, see the work of Martin Puchner.”
- *Shakespeare* (April 2017):
  - “I heard this paper presented at a conference, where it provoked profound skepticism on the part of the audience, and convinced no one (including myself).”
  - “The author needs to take more seriously than he does just why his ‘interpretation’ has been missing from the tradition, by and large.”
  - “Posed significant questions in arresting ways.”
  - “I find myself in disagreement with what is fundamental to the author’s argument.”
  - “I wonder whether an engagement with Calderwood’s ‘To Be And Not To Be’ might be productive.”
- *Shakespeare* (June 2017):
  - “I am now basically happy to accept it.”

# THE WRITING EXCHANGE IN EXPOS

- Response Papers
- Drafts
- Cover Letters
- Conferences
- Reader's Reports
- Workshops
- Comments
- Grades

Read *The Writing Exchange in Expos Packet* for next time. And sign up for an *Essay I Conference*.

# EXPOS 20: WHY SHAKESPEARE?

## SESSION 5: THESIS, STRUCTURE, STAKES

### Writing Due:

- [Response Paper 1.2: Evidence and Analysis](#)

### Reading for Today:

- [Brian Chen, "Smashing the Hall of Mirrors: The Layers of Meaning in the Play within the Play of Hamlet" \(2007\)](#) [Links to an external site.](#)
- [Aphorisms on Thesis Statements](#) [Links to an external site.](#)
- [Aphorisms on Stakes](#) [Links to an external site.](#)
- [Aphorisms on Implications](#) [Links to an external site.](#)

### In-Class Discussions:

- *From Argument to Thesis:* Work backward from having an argument to having a thesis.
- *Terms:* Discuss how to use key terms in a thesis, and how to set up terms in an introduction.
- *Thesis:* Rank a series of thesis statements from best to worst, and then try to articulate what makes a thesis either good or bad.
- *Stakes/Implications:* With reference to Chen's "Smashing the Hall of Mirrors," discuss strategies for identifying what's at stake in an introduction and discussing the implications of an argument in the conclusion.
- *Structure:* As a class, create a basic outline of Chen's "Smashing the Hall of Mirrors" in preparation for our next response papers.
- *The Writing Exchange in Expos:* As an introduction to the peer-review process, which is the model for the writing exchange in Expos 20, discuss the submission history of one of Wilson's articles. Very briefly review the formal elements of the writing exchange in Expos 20: cover letters, conferences, reader's reports, workshops, comments, grades. Discuss directions for and examples of each.

### Aphorisms (introduced in class, to be completed after class):

- [Aphorisms on Organization](#) [Links to an external site.](#)
- [Aphorisms on Organization for Close Readings](#) [Links to an external site.](#)
- [Aphorisms on Academic Publication](#) [Links to an external site.](#)

### Assignment:

- [Response Paper 1.3: A Basic Outline:](#) Draft a thesis and create a basic outline for your first paper.