

Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques*: Story of Hamlet

Roderick, the King of Denmark named brothers Horvendile and Fengon governors of the Province of Ditmarse. Because of Horvendile's impressive record as a soldier, the King gave him his daughter, Geruth, to marry. Geruth and Horvendile had a son named Hamlet.

Jealous of his brother, Fengon decided to kill Horvendile. He justified his crime by saying that Fengon was abusing his wife and he only killed Horvendile before he could do further harm to Geruth. Fengon then married Geruth, with whom he had been having an affair.

Hamlet, feeling abandoned by his mother and in danger of his life, feigned madness in order to save himself. He tore up his clothes, wallowed in the mud, ran through the streets, and refused to speak. He made pointed spears in the fire and when asked about them, said they were to avenge his father's death. While some dismissed his words as craziness, others began to suspect that perhaps Hamlet was not only not insane, but actually quite cunning and dangerous.

To test his sanity, it was decided that Hamlet and a beautiful woman would be put in a secluded place together. If Hamlet gave in to the temptation to sleep with her, he would be sentenced to death, since no sane man would be able to resist a beautiful woman. A childhood friend of Hamlet's, however, told Hamlet about the test. The woman, who had been in love with Hamlet since she was young, also informed him about the test. Hamlet, fully aware of the trap, did not sleep with the woman and it was concluded that he must actually be insane.

One of Fengon's friends, however, was still unconvinced that Hamlet was mad. He suggested that someone eavesdrop on Hamlet and Geruth when they were alone together and listen to see if Hamlet is just putting on an act for the rest of the court. Hamlet, already wary of Fengon's suspicion, found the eavesdropper and stabbed him through the drapes he was hiding behind. He then cut up the body, boiled it, and fed it to the hogs.

Hamlet then returned to his mother and harshly reprimanded her for marrying the man that killed her husband. He said that in marrying Fengon, she put him in danger because Fengon would want him dead too, not wanting the kingdom to be taken away from him. Geruth admitted that what she had done was wrong and that she was deeply ashamed of herself. She encouraged Hamlet to kill Fengon, but to be very careful because Fengon was dangerous.

Fengon sent Hamlet to London with a secret letter to the King of England that requested Hamlet be executed. With Hamlet went two of Fengon's courtiers. Hamlet discovered the secret letter, though, and while the courtiers were sleeping, he re-wrote the letter so that is said to kill the courtiers and have the King's daughter marry Hamlet.

The King held a dinner for his guests during which Hamlet ate nothing. Later that night, when they were going to sleep, the courtiers asked Hamlet why he ate nothing. Hamlet, who had divination abilities, had known that the food and wine had come from places where people had been killed. A secret eavesdropper, who the King of England had sent to spy on the travellers, heard everything that Hamlet said and reported it back to the King.

The King, impressed by what Hamlet said, gave him his daughter in marriage. He also had his courtiers executed, per the request of the doctored letter. The King gave Hamlet a sum of gold, which Hamlet melted down and poured into hollowed out sticks. Now married, Hamlet decided to return to Denmark.

Hamlet returned to the court at the same time that his funeral was being held. Upon seeing that Hamlet was not dead, the funeral turned into a celebration and everyone drank until they passed out. Using the hooks that he had sharpened before he went to England he tied everyone down and set fire to the banquet hall. He then went to Fengon's chamber and decapitated him.

The next day, after everyone in Denmark heard about the murder of Fengon and the destruction of the castle, Hamlet made a public speech about what he had done. Afterwards, he was applauded for his actions.

The King of England, hearing of Fengon's death, recalled a promise that he and Fengon had made to each other. They promised that if either of them were killed, the other would avenge their death. He sent Hamlet to see Hermetrude, the Queen of Scotland. The King of England hoped that Hermetrude would have Hamlet killed, as she was known to put to death any man who came to woo her. Hermetrude, however, had heard of Hamlet and instantly fell in love with him when she saw him. She argued that she would be a better match for Hamlet than his current one, the King of England's daughter.

Hamlet married Hermetrude and brought her home to live with him and his other wife. Realizing that his father-in-law, the King of England, wanted him dead, Hamlet killed him.

Hamlet's uncle, Wiglere, decided that he had the right to be king of Denmark, not Hamlet. Wiglere, who was having an affair with Hermetrude, waged war against Hamlet. Though Hamlet did not want to battle, preferring to die an honorable death, in combat, than lead a dishonorable life as a coward.

In the end, Hamlet is killed in battle and Hermetrude marries Wiglere. The narrator lauds Hamlet as a virtuous and heroic man.