

# Horatio and Laertes- Dramatic Functions

Aoife O'Driscoll  
[www.aoifesnotes.com](http://www.aoifesnotes.com)



To what extent do you agree or disagree with the above statement?  
Support your answer with reference to at least two female characters in the text.

**E HAMLET – William Shakespeare**

- (i) Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* has been described as "a disturbing psychological thriller."

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this description of the play?

In your response you should deal with all aspects of the statement, supporting your answer with reference to the text.

**OR**

- (ii) Shakespeare makes effective use of both Laertes and Horatio to fulfil a variety of dramatic functions in his play, *Hamlet*."

Discuss this statement, supporting your answer with reference to the text.

**SECTION II**

**THE COMPARATIVE STUDY**

**(70 marks)**

Candidates must answer **one** question from **either A** – The General Vision and Viewpoint **or B** –

**Code LF** for makes/does not make effective use of Laertes to fulfil a variety of dramatic functions

**Code HF** for makes/does not make effective use of Horatio to fulfil a variety of dramatic functions

### Indicative material

- **Laertes** – a foil/parallel to Hamlet, allows the audience consider the possibilities open to Hamlet, used to present contrasting perspectives on themes like justice and revenge, adds to the excitement and dramatic action, his interaction with Ophelia is revealing, pawn/co-conspirator of Claudius, witness against Claudius
- **Horatio** – used as part of the Chorus, effective role as a friend/confidant to Hamlet, used to anticipate/advance the plot, a reliable and credible reporter, a foil for Hamlet, he embodies certain attitudes and beliefs, a valuable witness to the action, the custodian of Hamlet's legacy
- It could be argued that both characters can be seen to be limited in their dramatic function.

**Etc.**

|      |  |
|------|--|
| P 18 |  |
| C 18 |  |
| L 18 |  |
| M 6  |  |

| 60 marks | H1      | H2 | H3 | H4 | H5 | H6 | H7 | H8     |
|----------|---------|----|----|----|----|----|----|--------|
| 100%     | 60 -54  | 48 | 42 | 36 | 30 | 24 | 18 | 17 - 0 |
| 30%      | 18 - 17 | 15 | 13 | 11 | 9  | 8  | 6  | 5 - 0  |



# Horatio

- Appears before Hamlet: establishes himself as a reliable and sensible commentator on events
- Sees the ghost of the dead king, thereby giving it legitimacy
- He is 'filled with fear and wonder' but identifies the Ghost, saying it wears the very armour the late king wore when he 'smote the dreaded Polacks on the ice'.
- Horatio lends credibility to the events and characters in the play, even when they seem fantastical



- Comments on political matters and says he fears the Ghost 'bodes some strange eruption to our state'
- Informs the audience of the conflict between Denmark and Norway and provides an accurate assessment of Fortinbras, introducing him as a young man 'of unimproved mettle hot and full'



- Less emotional than Hamlet: answers the young prince's excited questions about the Ghost calmly and precisely.
- Self-control and lack of passion make him the perfect foil for the highly-strung Hamlet: his caution contrasts sharply with Hamlet's impulsiveness
- Hamlet admires Horatio's balance: 'blest are they whose blood and judgement are so well commedled' 'Give me the man that is not passion's slave, and I will wear him in my heart's core'
- Along with his soliloquies, Hamlet's conversations with Horatio allows us an insight into his true feelings
- Acts as Hamlet's confidant and it is through him that we learn how unhappy Hamlet is at his mother's hasty remarriage: 'The funeral baked meats/Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables'.



- Hamlet tells Horatio, and by extension the audience, of his plan to use the play within the play to prove Claudius' guilt.
- Hamlet's conversation with Horatio after the play is clever and coherent, reinforcing the idea that he is rational. This is important as Hamlet's sanity is a matter of some doubt in the play



- Horatio is the epitome of loyalty in a corrupt, self-serving court.
- His support of Hamlet never wavers. He may not play an active role in Hamlet's schemes, but he is always there to offer advice and a sympathetic ear.
- Horatio's character is never developed beyond showing how intelligent, truthful, reliable and loyal he is.
- He is respected by all: when he warns Gertrude that if she does not speak to Ophelia, she may 'strew dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds', she immediately agrees with him



- Acts as a sounding board for Hamlet's philosophical comments on life and death.
- He is a true friend because, although he is on Hamlet's side, he never shows the sycophantic agreement of other courtiers
- It appears he is taken aback by Hamlet's callous dispatching of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet feels the need to remind Horatio that the pair 'did make love to this employment' and deserved their fate



- Horatio's good sense makes him suspicious of the duel between Hamlet and Laertes and he tries to persuade his friend not to participate. His reaction heightens the dramatic tension as the audience wonders if Hamlet will heed his words.
- Horatio's reaction to Hamlet's death highlights the tragedy of the young prince's untimely death
- He would rather die than live without his great friend: 'I am more antique Roman than a Dane / Here's yet some liquor left'.
- Hamlet gives Horatio his final role in the play, that of narrator and commentator 'And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain, to tell my story'.



# Laertes

- Loves Ophelia but, like Polonius, does his best to persuade her that Hamlet could not possibly be serious about her



- In Act 4 Scene 5, Laertes vows to be 'revenged/  
Most thoroughly' for Polonius' murder
- His instant action contrasts with Hamlet's inaction. Where Hamlet overthinks the matter, Laertes does not hesitate to storm Elsinore at the head of an angry mob
- Laertes is a foil to Hamlet



- Laertes shows how those who are bent on revenge can become morally compromised.
- He says he is willing to cut Hamlet's throat 'i' th' church' if needs be
- He is no match for Claudius and becomes tainted by the corruption the king has brought to the Danish court



- Laertes is redeemed somewhat in the final scene. He admits that he has been 'killed with mine own treachery' and asks Hamlet to 'Exchange forgiveness' with him
- In his final speech, he acknowledges Hamlet's nobility
- Foil to Hamlet but not all Hamlet should be. Allows himself to be corrupted in his desire to have revenge at any cost.
- Death highlights tragedy: he had many good qualities but becomes another victim of the rottenness at the heart of Elsinore under Claudius' corrupted rule