

Sample 6-2

Hamlet comes to an abrupt and bloody end with the final catastrophe scene. As sample conclusion number two states, one task remains, and it is Horatio who is nominated by the dying prince to perform it: the telling of the true story of “*How these things came about.*”

The “*divinity that shapes our ends*” (5.2), to which Hamlet tells Horatio he has surrendered his fate, resolves all but one of the prince’s concerns in a few short moments at the play’s end. Laertes pardons him for his and Polonius’ deaths; the villainous Claudius is exposed and punished; his nominated successor Young Fortinbras will protect the “*safety and health of this whole state*” (3.1); and, if at the cost of his life, Hamlet is granted his original wish: to leave the “*prison*” (2.2) of Elsinore.

Only one task remains, for which the dying prince requires his now grief-stricken friend forswear his “*antique Roman*” impulse towards suicide: “*Horatio, I am dead / Thou livest.*” The “*wounded name*” which Hamlet fears he leaves behind was expressed earlier by the grave-digging sexton: of “*he that is mad*” after “*losing his wits*” and “*sent into England*” (5.1). In place of this unflattering legacy, Hamlet’s request to his friend is that he not surrender to despair but live on to “*Report me and my cause aright / To the unsatisfied.*”

Despite his promise of “*All this I can truly deliver*”, given his limited knowledge, Horatio’s account can at best be only an incomplete one. The prince’s appointed biographer knows nothing of Hamlet’s soliloquies, his relationship with Ophelia, or his encounters with Claudius in his chapel and Gertrude in her closet.

That the prince believes an “*audience to this act*” will “*look pale and tremble*” at Horatio’s story suggests the title of the tale he will tell and perhaps the Players may perform: “*The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.*”