

Student Essay on The Importance of Polonius

The Importance of Polonius by William Shakespeare

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Essay

While Polonius often appears insignificant, he actually plays a crucial role in the plot of Hamlet. Polonius is an aging man, who we are told once counseled the great King Hamlet. However, Shakespeare convinces us that Polonius is past his prime. He appears as nothing more than an old windbag, whose speech is riddled with useless clichés. While Polonius is often given a bad rap, his actions and words are eventually prophetic to the development of the play. In Act I Scene III, for example, Polonius gives his son counsel saying "Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,/Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel" and "This above all: to thine own self be true." Polonius's advice to his son accentuates the normalcy of Laertes' family life in contrast with Hamlet's. In addition, the nature of Polonius advice contradicts many of the decisions Hamlet has made. For example, Polonius urges Laertes to embrace old friends; conversely, Hamlet has done the exact opposite. He has lost many friends, and seems very alone as demonstrated by his soliloquies. While Polonius is presented as a minor character, his advice is prophetic of something much greater to the play: the demise of the tragic hero, Hamlet.