

Intrigue

Shakespeare remarks, in many passages, on his understanding of the resemblance between life and the stage, as though we could learn about life by watching plays. In cases where a drama offers that degree of instruction, it may achieve its purpose by guile or intrigue. Do you get my point? By intrigue? Do you remember the mysterious mood that surrounded your first trip to a play with mom or dad, and the sense that a spell was being cast upon you? The costumed characters appearing on stage were there as messengers of a transfigured reality. (What you first *read*—a novel or story—was language transformed by imagination, but it was not that direct other reality that was some mysterious stage figure made in an intriguing place. Not only was Shakespeare a master of transformative language, which introduces another reality, but he was a master of the practical work that could be done by such language. In *Hamlet* the family scion has lost his father, thanks to the collusion of his mother with her lover. Their intrigue has cloaked the affair and the consequences of this collusion as it impinges on the character of *Hamlet*.

The only intrigue in the play is that cooked up by Hamlet himself, who is looking for assistance in taking revenge on the murderer of Hamlet's father. 'The play's the thing, wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king,' he proclaims, to his friends at court, making his own direct move into intrigue, the essence of a court plot to flush out the truth, to find out if the guilty seeming king will blanch at the presentation of a court masque inculcating the guilty king himself. Between Hamlet and his courtier allies pass the ingredients of a classic intrigue, by means of which an evil, guilt ridden murderer is induced to show his stripes.