CAPITOLO

# 13

# Power and Conscience: the Histories, *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*

*"The time is out of joint: O cursed spite, / That ever I was born to set it right!" — William Shakespeare, Hamlet, I.5*

**OBIETTIVI**

1. I can describe the last years of Elizabeth I — the succession question and the Essex rising — and explain why history plays mattered politically.
2. I can present Shakespeare's history plays, *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*, and define tragedy, the tragic hero and *hamartia*.
3. I can analyse Antony's funeral speech and two passages from *Hamlet*, recognising rhetorical devices and the three appeals.
4. I can express conditions with *provided*, *as long as*, *in case*, *suppose*, *otherwise* and *even if*.
5. I can take notes while listening, give a short signposted presentation and write a persuasive speech.
6. I can compare Hamlet with Castiglione's courtier and Shakespeare's Brutus with Dante's.

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Capitolo 13: Power and Conscience: the Histories, Julius Caesar and Hamlet · pagine 405–434 del volume completo · estratto per lo studio

In the last years of Elizabeth I nobody knew who would rule England next, and one of the queen's favourites tried to take power by force. In the same years Shakespeare wrote plays about kings who are deposed, about a Roman statesman murdered by his friends, and about a Danish prince who must avenge his father and cannot make up his mind. These plays ask questions that were dangerous to ask in the street: what makes a ruler legitimate? Is it ever right to kill a tyrant? And what happens inside the mind of a person who must act?

You will read Mark Antony's funeral speech from *Julius Caesar*, the most famous persuasive speech in English drama, and two passages from *Hamlet*. In the Language section you learn other ways of expressing a condition besides *if*; in Skills you listen to a student debate, give a presentation and write a speech of your own.

## 13.1 History and Society: the Last Years of Elizabeth

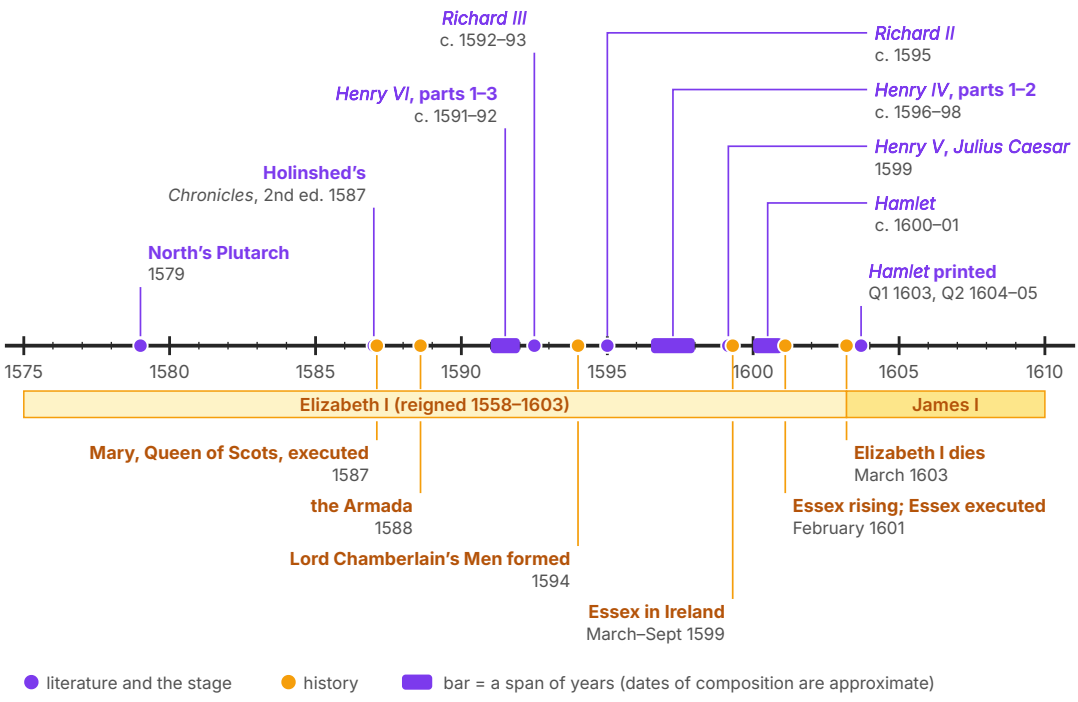


**Figura 13.1** Power on stage, 1575–1610: a proportional timeline (major ticks every 5 years). Violet: sources, plays and printings; amber: history. Bars show spans of years. Dates of composition are approximate (c.) and follow the usual modern chronology; the band under the axis shows the reigns.

The timeline (Figura 13.1) shows how closely Shakespeare's political plays follow one another: in less than ten years he wrote eight plays on English history, a Roman tragedy and *Hamlet*, while the old queen's reign came to its end.

### 13.1.1 An old queen and an open question

In the 1590s Elizabeth I was in her sixties. She had never married and had no children, and she refused to name an heir: an heir, she believed, would become the centre of a rival court, and every ambitious courtier would turn to the rising sun. The question of the **succession** (*successione*) — who would inherit the crown — was therefore the great unspoken question of the age. The strongest claim belonged to James VI of Scotland, the son of Mary, Queen of Scots (chapter 8), but discussing it openly was dangerous: Peter Wentworth, a member of Parliament who insisted on raising it, was sent to the Tower of London in 1593 and died there a few years later.

The decade was hard in other ways too. The war with Spain did not end with the Armada of 1588; a series of bad harvests in the middle of the 1590s made bread expensive and the poor hungry; and in Ireland a long and costly war began in 1594 against Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone. The great ministers of the reign were dying. When Lord Burghley, the queen's chief adviser for forty years, died in 1598, his son Robert Cecil took his place, and the court divided between Cecil and a younger, more brilliant rival.

### 13.1.2 The Essex rising

That rival was Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex (1565–1601), the last favourite of the queen: handsome, proud, popular with Londoners and with soldiers, a hero after his attack on Cádiz in 1596. In 1599 Elizabeth sent him to Ireland with one of the largest armies of her reign. He achieved little, made a truce with Tyrone against her orders and in September came back to court without permission. He was put under house arrest and lost his offices and his income. Ruined and angry, he began to plan a **conspiracy** (*congiura*): a secret plan by a group of people to do something harmful or illegal — in this case, to force his way to the queen and remove his enemies.

A day or two before the rising, some of Essex's supporters asked the Lord Chamberlain's Men to perform at the Globe, on Saturday 7 February 1601, "the play of the deposing and killing of King Richard II" — almost certainly Shakespeare's *Richard II*, in which a king is forced to give up his crown. The actors objected that the play was old and would draw a small audience, and were paid extra to stage it. On 8 February Essex marched into the City of London with a few hundred armed followers, calling on the citizens to join him. Nobody did. By the evening he had surrendered; he was tried for treason and beheaded in the Tower on 25 February 1601.

The players were questioned, but not punished. On the evening before Essex's execution they performed at court, in front of the queen. Others were less lucky. Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton — the young nobleman to whom Shakespeare had dedicated his two narrative

poems (chapter 11) — was condemned to death with Essex; his sentence was changed to prison, and he was freed only when James I came to the throne in 1603.

**APPROFONDIMENTO**

**"I am Richard II."** Six months after the rising, the antiquary William Lambarde brought the queen a catalogue of the records kept in the Tower. According to a note of their conversation that is said to be his own (some historians doubt that it is genuine), when they reached the reign of Richard II, Elizabeth said: "I am Richard II, know ye not that?", and complained that the tragedy had been played many times in streets and houses. Historians still debate exactly which play she meant and how far we can trust a conversation recorded by one of the two speakers. What the episode certainly shows is that, in 1601, a play about a deposed king was not just entertainment: the queen herself read it as a comment on her own reign.

### 13.1.3 History on the stage

After the victory over the Armada, the English became curious about their own past. Printers sold large chronicles, histories of England told reign by reign: Edward Hall's history of the houses of Lancaster and York (1548) and, above all, Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577; second edition 1587), Shakespeare's main source for English history. On the stage, the playhouses (chapter 10) answered the same curiosity with a new genre, the **history play** (*dramma storico*): a play that dramatises the reign of an English king, using real events and people, compressed and rearranged to make a story.

History plays offered battles, crowds and patriotism. They also offered something more precious: a safe distance. Every play was read by the Master of the Revels (chapter 10), and a play about the present succession would never have been licensed. But a play about Richard II, deposed in 1399, could ask dangerous questions in the costume of the past. Can a bad but lawful king be removed? Is a strong usurper better than a weak rightful ruler? What does it cost a country when the great families fight for the crown? Censorship was real: the scene in which Richard II gives up his crown does not appear in the editions of the play printed in Elizabeth's lifetime (1597 and 1598), and was first printed only in 1608.

### 13.1.4 The Tudor myth

The Tudor historians told the story of the 15th century in a particular way. In 1399 Henry Bolingbroke deposed Richard II and became Henry IV; this crime against a lawful king, they suggested, brought God's punishment on England in the form of decades of civil war, the Wars of the Roses (chapter 7). The punishment ended only in 1485, when Henry Tudor defeated the wicked Richard III at Bosworth and married Elizabeth of York, uniting the red rose and the white. Modern critics call this providential story, which made the Tudors the healers of the nation, the **Tudor myth** (*mito Tudor*).

The villain of the myth was Richard III. Thomas More (chapter 8) began a *History of King Richard III* around 1513, in which Richard is a deformed, cunning murderer who kills his young nephews, the princes in the Tower; Hall and Holinshed repeated the portrait, and Shakespeare made it unforgettable. Modern historians are more cautious: many facts are uncertain, and the winners wrote the history. In 2012 Richard's skeleton was found under a car park in Leicester. It showed a strongly curved spine, which the legend had turned into a monstrous hunchback; he was reburied in Leicester Cathedral in 2015.

## 13.2 Literature: Histories, Roman Plays and Tragedy

### 13.2.1 The history plays

When Shakespeare's friends collected his plays in the First Folio of 1623 (chapter 14), they divided them into comedies, histories and tragedies; ten plays stand under "Histories". Eight of them form two cycles of four plays, or **tetralogies** (*tetralogia*), shown in Figura 13.2. Strangely, Shakespeare wrote the later part of the story first. The first tetralogy, written about 1591–93, covers the Wars of the Roses: the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*. The second, written about 1595–99, goes back in time to explain how the conflict began: *Richard II*, the two parts of *Henry IV* and *Henry V*.

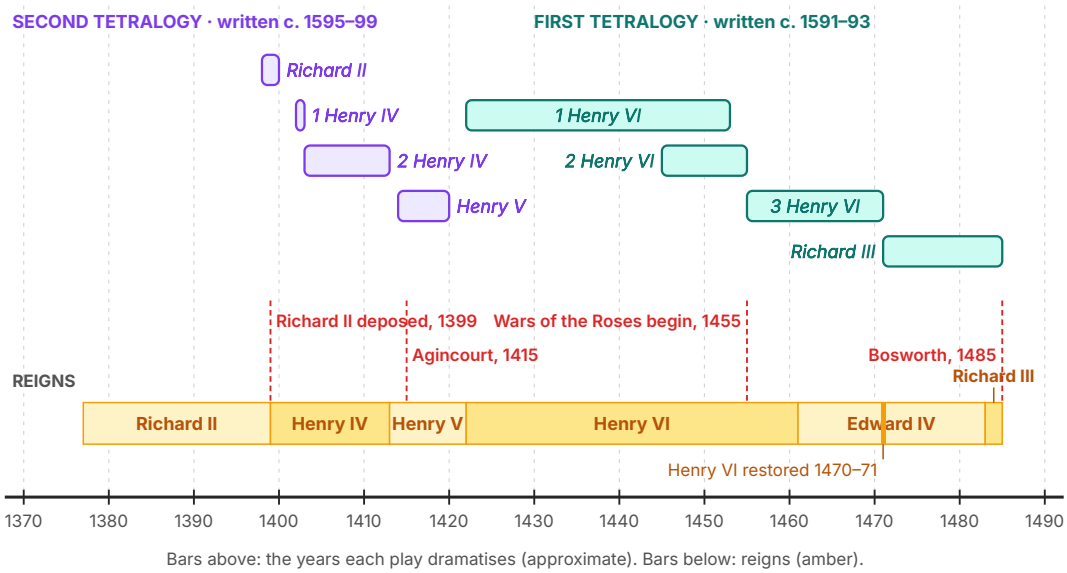


**Figura 13.2** Shakespeare's two tetralogies against the reigns they dramatise. The years covered by each play are approximate: the plays compress and rearrange events. The first tetralogy was written before the second, although it dramatises later history. The other two histories of the First Folio, *King John* and *Henry VIII*, are not shown.

In *Henry IV* Prince Hal spends his time in taverns with the fat, witty knight Sir John Falstaff, before he rejects him and becomes the warrior king of *Henry V* (1599), the victor of Agincourt (1415). Before each act a chorus — the single speaker you met in *Doctor Faustus* (chapter 10) — apologises for the poverty of the stage and asks the audience to imagine what it cannot show:

> *O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend*
> *The brightest heaven of invention,*
> *A kingdom for a stage, princes to act*
> *And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!*
>
> — William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Prologue, ll. 1–4 (text of the MIT Shakespeare)

A few lines later the Chorus calls the playhouse "this wooden O": a round wooden building, like the Curtain or the new Globe. The whole speech is a lesson in how Elizabethan theatre worked: "Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts". The battles were fought with a few actors and a drum; the audience did the rest.

DA RICORDARE

**History play**: a play on the reign of an English king. **First tetralogy** (written c. 1591–93): *Henry VI* 1–3, *Richard III*. **Second tetralogy** (written c. 1595–99): *Richard II*, *Henry IV* 1–2, *Henry V*. Main source: Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587). **Tudor myth**: the deposition of Richard II (1399) → civil war → peace with Henry VII (1485).

### 13.2.2 *Julius Caesar*: Rome on the Bankside

In 1599 Shakespeare turned from English to Roman history. A Swiss traveller, Thomas Platter, wrote in his diary that on 21 September 1599 he crossed the Thames and saw a tragedy about Julius Caesar, well acted, in a playhouse with a thatched roof: very probably Shakespeare's play at the new Globe. Shakespeare's source was Plutarch, the Greek biographer of the 1st–2nd century AD, whose *Lives* of famous Greeks and Romans he read in Thomas North's English version (1579), translated not from the Greek but from Jacques Amyot's French. *Julius Caesar* is the first of his Roman plays; *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* followed later.

Fearing that Caesar will make himself king, Cassius persuades Marcus Brutus, a man respected for his honesty, to join a conspiracy; on the Ides of March (15 March 44 BC) they stab Caesar. Antony's funeral speech turns Rome against them, civil war follows, and at Philippi Cassius and Brutus kill themselves. Antony gives Brutus his epitaph: "This was the noblest Roman of them all".

The heart of the play is the forum scene (III.2), a contest of **rhetoric** (*retorica*): the art of speaking and writing in order to persuade. Brutus speaks first, in prose, in short balanced sentences that appeal to reason and honour: "Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more". He wins the crowd, and leaves. Antony speaks in blank verse, and does something much cleverer: he never contradicts Brutus directly, but lets the facts, the questions and finally the tears do the work (T1). The Greek philosopher Aristotle, in his *Rhetoric* (4th century BC), had described three ways to persuade an audience, the three appeals of **ethos, pathos and logos**: the character of the speaker, the feelings of the listeners, and reasoning with evidence (Figura 13.3).

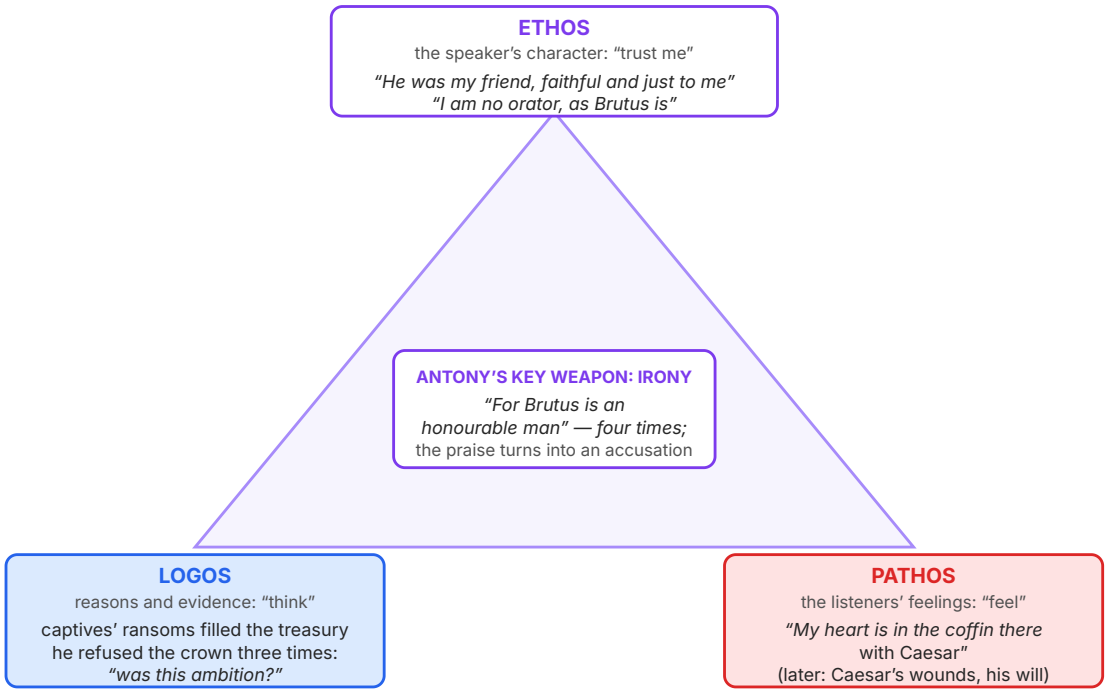


**Figura 13.3** The three appeals of rhetoric described by Aristotle, with examples from Antony's funeral speech (*Julius Caesar*, III.2). Irony, at the centre, connects them: the praise of Brutus becomes an accusation.

### 13.2.3 What is a tragedy?

*Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet* are tragedies. A **tragedy** (*tragedia*) is a serious play in which the main character moves from happiness to disaster, usually to death. The first theory of tragedy is again Aristotle's, in the *Poetics*. Tragedy, he says, imitates a serious action and, through pity and fear, produces a **catharsis** (*catarsi*): a release or purification of those emotions in the audience. Its ideal protagonist is the **tragic hero** (*eroe tragico*): a great figure, better than most of us but not perfect, who falls not through pure wickedness but through **hamartia** (*errore tragico*), a mistake or error of judgement. Later critics often translated *hamartia* as a "tragic flaw" of character — Hamlet's hesitation, Brutus's idealism — but Aristotle's word means "missing the mark", as an archer misses a target, and scholars still discuss how to read it.

Elizabethan writers knew Aristotle less directly than Seneca, the Roman philosopher and playwright of the 1st century AD, whose ten tragedies were translated into English in 1581. **Senecan tragedy** (*tragedia senecana*) gave them five acts, ghosts calling for vengeance, crimes inside royal families, long rhetorical speeches and horror; Kyd built the revenge tragedy on this model (chapter 10). Shakespeare used these ingredients freely, and mixed kings with gravediggers and jokes with murder.

### 13.2.4 *Hamlet*

*Hamlet* was written around 1600–01 and is the longest of Shakespeare's plays. It survives in three early texts that differ in many words and lines: a short first quarto (Q1, 1603), a long second quarto (Q2, 1604–05) and the First Folio (1623). The story is old: the legend of Amleth, a Danish prince who pretends to be mad to avenge his father, was told by Saxo Grammaticus around 1200 (see the Connections section), and a lost English play about Hamlet was on the stage by 1589. Shakespeare turned a simple revenge story into a play about thought itself. Figura 13.4 shows the characters, and Figura 13.5 the shape of the plot.

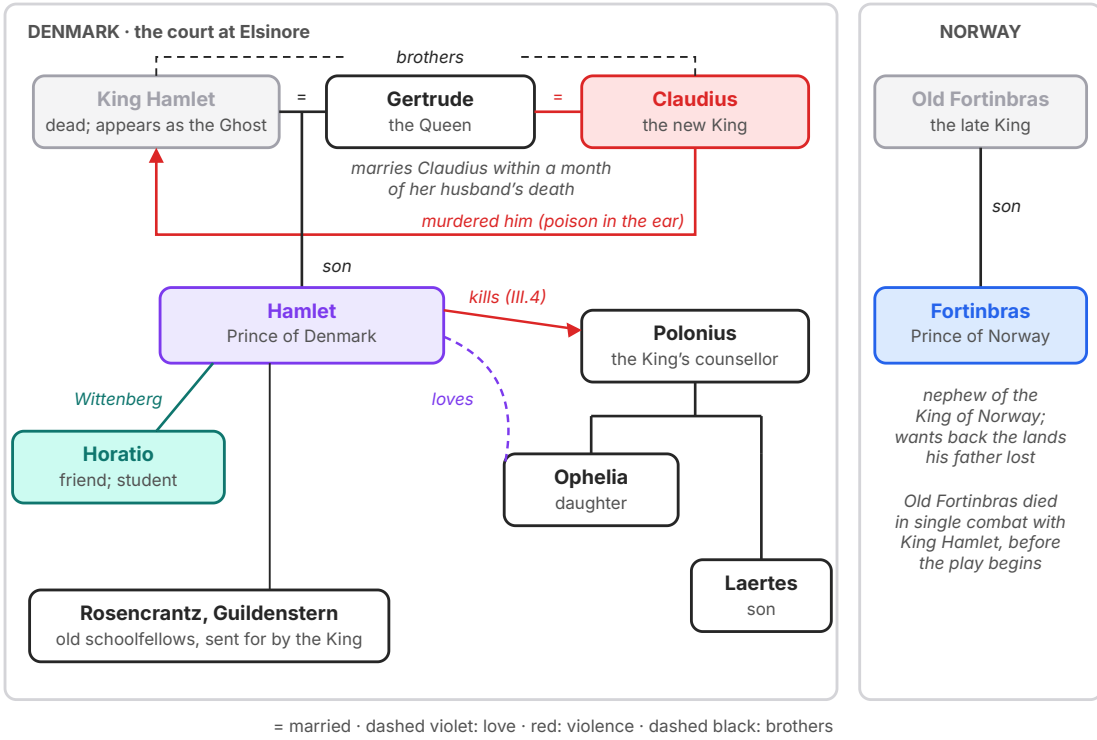


**Figura 13.4** The characters of *Hamlet* and their relations, as stated in the play. Claudius has murdered his brother, King Hamlet, by pouring poison into his ear as he slept in his orchard (I.5).

**The Ghost and the mask of madness.** The ghost of the dead king tells Hamlet that his brother Claudius murdered him, and asks for revenge. But can a ghost be trusted? To a Protestant audience it might be a devil in disguise, and Hamlet fears it: "The spirit that I have seen / May be the devil" (II.2). To watch the court unsuspected, he decides to "put an antic disposition on" (I.5), to act as if he were mad; Polonius comments: "Though this be madness, yet there is me-

thod in ’t” (II.2). Ophelia, rejected by Hamlet and then robbed of her father, goes truly mad and drowns.

**The play within the play.** When a company of actors arrives at Elsinore, Hamlet asks them to perform a play about a murder like his father’s, and to watch the king’s face: “the play’s the thing / Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king” (II.2). A **play within the play** (*teatro nel teatro*) is a performance staged by characters for other characters inside a play. Here it works as a trap — Hamlet calls it “The Mousetrap” — and Claudius rises in terror. It is also a mirror for us: the audience at the Globe watched the court of Denmark watching a play.

**Revenge and delay.** Hamlet now knows the truth, yet he does not act. He finds Claudius alone, praying, and spares him; minutes later he stabs Polonius, hidden behind a curtain, thinking he is the king. Sent to England, he escapes, and the final duel with Laertes kills the queen, Laertes, the king and Hamlet himself; Fortinbras of Norway takes the empty throne. Why does Hamlet delay? Because he doubts the Ghost, thinks too much, or cannot kill? The play gives no single answer, and that is part of its power.

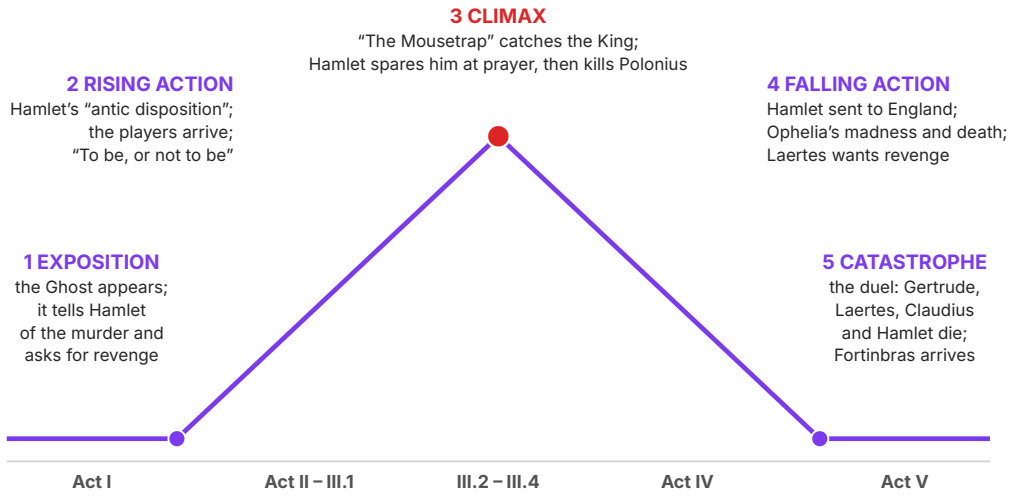


**Figura 13.5** Freytag’s pyramid applied to *Hamlet*. The German critic Gustav Freytag (1863) described the five-part shape of many five-act tragedies; this is one possible reading of the play, not a rule Shakespeare followed.

In Figura 13.5 the plot is drawn as **Freytag’s pyramid** (*piramide di Freytag*), a diagram of a plot in five parts: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and catastrophe. It is a useful map, but only a map: the best scenes of *Hamlet* are its soliloquies (chapter 10), where nothing happens on stage and everything happens in a mind. Hamlet is also the image of the Renaissance prince that Ophelia mourns when she believes him mad: “The courtier’s, soldier’s, scholar’s,

eye, tongue, sword" (III.1) — a student from Wittenberg, a soldier, a lover of theatre, a man who thinks about everything.

**ERRORE FREQUENTE**

✗ «Amleto recita "To be, or not to be" con un teschio in mano.» → ✓ Il monologo è nell'atto III, scena 1, e Amleto è solo (o crede di esserlo). Il teschio è quello di Yorick, il buffone di corte, nella scena del cimitero (V.1): "Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio" — non ✗ "I knew him well".

✗ «I drammi storici di Shakespeare raccontano la storia com'è andata.» → ✓ Sono opere teatrali: comprimono gli anni, inventano dialoghi e personaggi (Falstaff) e seguono le cronache Tudor, che erano di parte (il *Tudor myth*). Per i fatti storici si usano le fonti e gli storici moderni.

## 13.3 Texts: Persuasion and Thought

Three passages: a speech that changes the mind of a crowd, and two moments in which Hamlet thinks aloud — once in verse, alone, and once in prose, to two old friends he no longer trusts. Read each passage aloud before you study it.

### 13.3.1 T1 · William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, III.2: "Friends, Romans, countrymen"

**Context.** Caesar lies dead in the forum. Brutus has just explained to the people why he killed him, and the crowd is on his side: one citizen even shouts that Brutus should be crowned. Before leaving, Brutus allows Antony to speak at the funeral, on condition that he says nothing against the conspirators. Antony comes in with Caesar's body.

**Tabella 13.1** T1 — *Julius Caesar*, III.2, the opening of Antony's funeral speech. Text of the MIT Shakespeare (the public-domain Moby edition of the Globe text), checked against Project Gutenberg eBook #100; apostrophes and dashes typeset. Line numbers count the lines of this extract.

| | |
|---|---|
| Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears; | |
| I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. | |
| The evil that men do lives after them; | |
| The good is oft interred with their bones; | |
| So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus | 5 |
| Hath told you Caesar was ambitious: | |
| If it were so, it was a grievous fault, | |
| And grievously hath Caesar answer'd it. | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest— | |
| For Brutus is an honourable man; | 10 |
| So are they all, all honourable men— | |
| Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral. | |
| He was my friend, faithful and just to me: | |
| But Brutus says he was ambitious; | |
| And Brutus is an honourable man. | 15 |
| He hath brought many captives home to Rome | |
| Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill: | |
| Did this in Caesar seem ambitious? | |
| When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept: | |
| Ambition should be made of sterner stuff: | 20 |
| Yet Brutus says he was ambitious; | |
| And Brutus is an honourable man. | |

**Glosses.** *lend me your ears*: listen to me; *interred*: buried; *grievous*: serious; *answer'd it*: paid for it; *under leave of*: with the permission of; *captives*: prisoners of war; *ransoms*: money paid to free prisoners; *the general coffers*: the public treasury; *when that*: when; *sterner stuff*: harder material.

### Analysis

**Form.** Antony speaks in blank verse, after Brutus's prose. The verse gives his speech music and dignity, and the regular beat makes the key phrases easy to remember — and to repeat. The opening line is a **rule of three** (*regola del tre*), a list of three items that sounds complete and builds to a climax: *Friends, Romans, countrymen*. Each word brings the listeners closer to him: first friends, then fellow citizens.

**Irony.** Antony has promised not to blame the conspirators, so he praises them. But each time he says "Brutus is an honourable man" it follows a fact that shows Caesar was not ambitious: he wept for the poor, he filled the treasury, he refused the crown. The repeated phrase stays the same while its meaning changes: by the fourth time ("And, sure, he is an honourable man", just after our extract) the crowd hears the opposite of what the words say. This is irony (chapter 6) used as a weapon, and it allows Antony to accuse without accusing.

**Persuasion.** Antony uses the three appeals (Figura 13.3 shows them). *Ethos*: he presents himself as a grieving friend, not a politician. *Logos*: he offers evidence and rhetorical questions — "Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?" — and lets the crowd answer for itself. *Pathos*: a moment after our extract he breaks off, "My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar", and waits; later he

will show Caesar's wounds and read his will. By the end of the scene the crowd is running through Rome to burn the conspirators' houses.

1. Where is Antony, and who is listening? What has Brutus asked him not to do?
2. In l. 2 Antony says he has not come "to praise" Caesar. Does he keep his word? Give two examples.
3. Find three facts that Antony offers against the idea that Caesar was ambitious.
4. How many times does the word "honourable" appear in the extract? How does its meaning change?
5. Find a rhetorical question. Why does Antony not answer it himself?

**ESEMPIO SVOLTO**

**Analysing a persuasive speech in four steps.** Use the method on any speech, from Antony to a modern politician.

1. **Situation.** Who speaks, to whom, when, and what does the audience think at the start? → Antony speaks to a crowd that supports Brutus; he is not allowed to blame the conspirators.
2. **Aim.** What does the speaker want the audience to think or do at the end? → To turn the crowd against Brutus and the conspirators.
3. **Strategy.** Which appeals and devices does he use, and where? → *Ethos* ("He was my friend"), *logos* (the ransoms, the refused crown), *pathos* (his heart in the coffin); devices: rule of three (l. 1), repetition with irony ("honourable man"), rhetorical questions (l. 18, and later "was this ambition?").
4. **Effect.** Does it work, and why? → Yes: by never contradicting Brutus openly, Antony keeps his promise in words and breaks it in meaning, and the crowd reaches his conclusion believing it is its own.

Write your findings as a PEE paragraph (chapter 6): *Point* — Antony attacks Brutus while appearing to praise him; *Evidence* — "Yet Brutus says he was ambitious; / And Brutus is an honourable man"; *Explanation* — after each piece of evidence the same phrase sounds more false, so the praise becomes an accusation.

### 13.3.2 T2 · William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III.1: "To be, or not to be"

**Context.** Claudius and Polonius have hidden to spy on Hamlet, who is meant to meet Ophelia. Hamlet enters, believing himself alone, and speaks the most famous soliloquy in English. He does not talk about his father or about revenge, but about a question that concerns everyone: is it better to live and suffer, or to die?

**Tabella 13.2** T2 — *Hamlet*, III.1, the first fourteen lines of the soliloquy. Text of the MIT Shakespeare (the public-domain Moby edition of the Globe text), checked against Project Gutenberg eBook #100; apostrophes and dashes typeset. Line numbers count the lines of this extract.

| | |
|---|---|
| To be, or not to be, that is the question, | |
| Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer | |
| The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, | |
| Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, | |
| And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep; | 5 |
| No more; and by a sleep to say we end | |
| The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks | |
| That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation | |
| Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep; | |
| To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub; | 10 |
| For in that sleep of death what dreams may come | |
| When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, | |
| Must give us pause: there's the respect | |
| That makes calamity of so long life; | |

**Glosses.** *slings and arrows*: weapons shot from a distance, i.e. the blows of bad luck; *outrageous*: cruel, violent; *take arms against*: fight; *shocks*: blows; *that flesh is heir to*: that the body inherits, that every human being suffers; *consummation*: an end, a completion; *devoutly*: sincerely; *perchance*: perhaps; *rub*: obstacle (a term from the game of bowls); *shuffled off this mortal coil*: thrown off the trouble of mortal life; *respect*: consideration; *makes calamity of so long life*: makes misery last so long.

### Analysis

**Form.** The soliloquy begins with two infinitives and a choice: *To be, or not to be*. The first line has eleven syllables: a regular pentameter followed by an extra unstressed syllable, a feminine ending (chapter 10), which makes it sound unfinished, like a question left open. The sentences run over the line endings and break in the middle of lines ("To die: to sleep; / No more"): this is verse that imitates thinking, with its starts, pauses and second thoughts.

**Language.** The speech is built on pairs of opposites, antitheses (chapter 8): *to be / not to be*, *to suffer / to take arms*, *sleep / dream*. Its images are physical — slings and arrows, a sea of troubles, shocks, a coil to be thrown off — so that abstract ideas become things we can see. Note the mixed metaphor of taking arms against a sea: you cannot fight the sea with a sword, and perhaps that is the point.

**Themes.** Hamlet reasons like the Wittenberg student he is. Death looks like sleep, the end of all pain — and then he stops at the word *dream*. What if death is not an end? The fear of what

may come after death “must give us pause”, and this fear, not courage, keeps people alive. Hamlet speaks of “we” and “us”, never “I”: the private crisis of a prince becomes a meditation on the human condition.

1. Where is Hamlet, and why is it ironic that he believes he is alone?
2. What are the two choices described in ll. 2–5?
3. Why is death first compared to sleep? Which word changes Hamlet’s line of thought, and why?
4. Hamlet never says “I” in these lines. Who is “we”? What is the effect?
5. Find two images of fighting and one image of the sea. Do they fit together?

### 13.3.3 T3 · William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II.2: “What a piece of work is a man”

**Context.** Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two old school friends, have been sent for by the king to find out what troubles Hamlet. He forces them to admit it, and then describes his state of mind — in prose, the language of conversation, but prose that rises to the height of poetry.

**Tabella 13.3** T3 — *Hamlet*, II.2, Hamlet to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (prose). Text of the MIT Shakespeare (the public-domain Moby edition of the Globe text), checked against Project Gutenberg eBook #100; apostrophes and dashes typeset.

> I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o’erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? man delights not me: no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.

**Glosses.** *of late*: recently; *wherefore*: why; *mirth*: happiness, laughter; *forgone all custom of exercises*: given up all my usual activities; *goodly frame*: beautiful structure; *promontory*: a high piece of land going out into the sea; *canopy*: a cloth roof over a bed or a throne; *brave*: splendid; *firmament*: the sky; *fretted*: decorated in relief; *pestilent*: poisonous, causing disease; *express*: perfectly made; *apprehension*: understanding; *paragon*: perfect model; *quintessence*: the purest essence (in old science, the fifth element of the heavens).

#### Analysis

**Structure.** The passage moves in two waves. First Hamlet describes the universe — the earth, the air, the sky with its stars — and then man, each time with words of wonder, and each time he turns the wonder upside down: the sky is “a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours”, man is “this quintessence of dust”. The “And yet” in the middle is the hinge of the whole speech.

**Language.** The praise of man is a series of exclamations of similar length — *how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty!* — that climb from reason to angels to gods: the language of Renaissance humanism (chapter 8), which placed man at the top of creation, just below the angels in the Great Chain of Being. Hamlet knows this language perfectly. What has changed is not the world but the eye that looks at it.

**Themes.** This is melancholy, the illness of scholars in Renaissance medicine: everything is beautiful and nothing gives pleasure. Hamlet is also acting before the king's spies, but the words go beyond the trick.

1. Why does Hamlet speak to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern so openly? Is he completely sincere?
2. Find the four elements Hamlet first praises and then reduces (earth, air, sky, man). What does each become?
3. Why does the speech change at "And yet"?
4. What does "quintessence of dust" mean? Which biblical idea does "dust" recall?
5. Compare T2 and T3: in which text does Hamlet speak of the world, and in which of death? Which do you find more modern?

## 13.4 Language: Alternatives to *If*

### 13.4.1 What you already know

You have used *if* in all the conditionals: zero, first, second and third (English 2, Units 4 and 11) and mixed conditionals (chapter 7). You also know *unless* = *if … not* (English 2, Unit 4): *Unless Hamlet acts, Claudius will stay on the throne.* English has several other words that introduce a condition, each with its own meaning. They follow the tense rules of *if*: no *will* in the condition clause.

**Tabella 13.4** Alternatives to *if*: meaning and examples

| Expression | Meaning | Example |
|---|---|---|
| *provided / providing (that), as long as, so long as* | only if this condition is true | *You can speak, provided (that) you don't blame us.* |
| *on condition that* | only if (formal: an agreement, a rule) | *Brutus let Antony speak on condition that he said nothing against them.* |
| *in case* | as a precaution, because something may happen | *Take notes in case the teacher asks questions.* |
| *suppose / supposing, what if* | imagine that… | *Supposing the Ghost is lying, what then?* |
| *otherwise* | if not (refers back to the previous sentence) | *Hamlet must act; otherwise Claudius will act first.* |
| *even if* | whether or not this happens, the result is the same | *Even if he knew the truth, he wouldn't act.* |
| *unless* (recall) | except if, if … not | *Nothing will change unless somebody speaks.* |

### 13.4.2 Strong conditions: *provided, as long as, on condition that*

*Provided (that)*, *providing (that)*, *as long as* and *so long as* introduce a necessary condition: the main action happens only if the condition is met. They are stronger than *if*. *As long as* is common in speech; *provided* is a little more formal; *on condition that* is formal and suits rules, contracts and agreements. Like *if*, they take a present tense for the future:

- *The crowd will listen to you as long as you speak briefly.* (✗ *as long as you will speak*)
- *Students may leave early provided that they have finished the test.*
- *The company was allowed to perform on condition that the play was licensed.* (past: past tense)
- In the second conditional they take a past tense: *I'd lend you my copy of* Hamlet *as long as you gave it back by Friday.*

**GRAMMAR IN ITALIANO**

**Condizioni forti.** *provided / providing (that), as long as, on condition that = purché, a patto che, a condizione che*. In italiano reggono il congiuntivo (*purché tu parli*); in inglese il presente indicativo per il futuro, mai *will*: *as long as you speak*.

**Confronto con l'italiano.** Attenzione: *as long as* significa anche «finché, per tutto il tempo che» (*Stay as long as you like* = resta quanto vuoi). Il contesto chiarisce se si tratta di una condizione o di una durata.

### 13.4.3 A precaution: *in case*

*In case* does not introduce a condition but a reason for a precaution: we do something now because something else **might** happen later. Compare:

- *I'll take an umbrella in case it rains.* → I take it now, before I know; maybe it won't rain.
- *I'll take an umbrella if it rains.* → I'll take it only when it is already raining.
- Present for the future, past for the past: *Horatio stayed near the door in case Hamlet needed him.* Never *will* after *in case*. *Just in case* is common in speech: *Bring a pen, just in case.*
- *In case of* + noun is used in formal notices: *In case of fire, use the stairs* (= if there is a fire).

**GRAMMAR IN ITALIANO**

***In case* = nel caso che… / per precauzione.** *In case* + frase indica una precauzione presa **prima**: *Prendo l'ombrello in caso piova* = *I'll take an umbrella in case it rains* (lo prendo comunque).

**Confronto con l'italiano.** In italiano «nel caso in cui» si usa spesso come semplice «se»: *Nel caso in cui piova, la gita è rinviata*. In inglese qui serve *if*: *If it rains, the trip will be postponed*, non ✗ *in case it rains*. Chiediti: faccio qualcosa **prima**, per precauzione? → *in case*. Faccio qualcosa **solo se** succede? → *if*.

### 13.4.4 Imagining: *suppose*, *supposing*, *what if*

*Suppose*, *supposing* and *what if* ask the listener to imagine a situation. They start a question or a suggestion, and they can carry the meaning of all the conditionals:

- real possibility (present tense): *What if the Ghost is a devil?* · *Suppose we meet at six?* (a suggestion)
- unlikely or imaginary (past tense): *Supposing Hamlet told Horatio everything, would he believe him?*
- past, impossible to change (past perfect): *What if Hamlet had killed Claudius at prayer? The play would have ended in Act III.*

### 13.4.5 *Otherwise*, *unless*, and *even if* vs *even though*

*Otherwise* means "if not", but it refers back to a sentence already said, and it usually starts a new clause: *We must leave now; otherwise we'll miss the train* (= if we don't leave now…). *Unless* introduces the condition clause directly: *We'll miss the train unless we leave now.*

*Even if* introduces a condition that does not change the result: *Even if Brutus had stayed, Antony would have won the crowd* (whether or not Brutus stayed). *Even though* (English 2, Unit 9) introduces a fact, not a condition: *Even though Brutus was honest, he joined the conspiracy* (he was honest: it is true).

**GRAMMAR IN ITALIANO**

***Suppose / what if* e *otherwise*.** *Suppose / supposing / what if* = *supponiamo che, e se...?*: con il presente per un'ipotesi reale, con il passato per un'ipotesi improbabile, con il *past perfect* per il passato (*E se Amleto avesse ucciso Claudio?* = *What if Hamlet had killed Claudius?*). *Otherwise* = *altrimenti*.

***Even if* e *even though*.** L'italiano usa *anche se* per tutti e due. L'inglese distingue: *even if* = anche nel caso che (ipotesi: *anche se piovesse, verrei* = *even if it rained, I'd come*); *even though* = sebbene (fatto vero: *anche se pioveva, sono venuto* = *even though it was raining, I came*).

**ERRORE FREQUENTE**

✗ *I'll bring a map in case we will get lost.* → ✓ *in case we get lost.* · ✗ *as long as you will help me* → ✓ *as long as you help me*. (Dopo *in case*, *provided*, *as long as*: niente *will*.)

✗ *In case you see Sam, tell him I called.* (se lo vedi, solo allora) → ✓ *If you see Sam, tell him I called.*

✗ *Even if he was tired, he finished the essay.* (era davvero stanco) → ✓ *Even though he was tired, he finished the essay.* · ✗ *Unless you don't hurry, you'll be late.* → ✓ *Unless you hurry...*

## 13.5 Skills: Persuading an Audience

### 13.5.1 Vocabulary: politics and persuasion

You already know *persuade*, *campaign*, *protest* and *rights* (English 2). Tabella 13.5 adds the words you need to talk about power and about the art of convincing people.

**Tabella 13.5** Politics and persuasion: key words

| Word | Meaning | Example |
|---|---|---|
| power / powerful | the ability to control people and events | Caesar had become too powerful for the Senate. |
| ambition / ambitious | a strong wish for success or power | Was Caesar really ambitious? |
| conspiracy / conspirator | a secret plan to do something illegal / a person in it | Cassius led the conspiracy. |
| betray / betrayal | to be disloyal to a friend or a country | Brutus betrayed his friend for Rome. |
| convince | to make someone believe something is true | Antony convinced the crowd that Caesar was innocent. |
| persuade (recall) | to make someone decide to do something | Cassius persuaded Brutus to join them. |
| rhetoric / rhetorical | the art of persuasive speech (also: empty, insincere words) | His speech was pure rhetoric. |
| appeal to | to try to move someone's feelings or reason | Antony appealed to the crowd's emotions. |
| crowd | a large group of people in one place | The crowd turned against the conspirators. |
| usurper / overthrow | someone who takes power illegally / to remove a ruler by force | Essex hoped to overthrow his enemies. |

**Collocations with *make* and *take*.** Both verbs mean "do", but they combine with fixed nouns. *Make*: *make a decision*, *make a point* (state an argument), *make a speech*, *make a promise* (chapter 3), *make an effort*, *make a mistake*. *Take*: *take action*, *take sides* (support one group in a conflict), *take power*, *take revenge (on someone)*, *take responsibility (for)*, *take part (in)*. Hamlet cannot *make a decision* or *take action*; Laertes *takes revenge* without thinking twice.

LEARNING TO LEARN

**Active listening and note-taking.** A speech is heard once: you cannot go back. Before you listen, read the title and predict two arguments. While you listen:

- **Listen for signposts.** Words like *first of all*, *moving on to*, *however*, *to sum up* tell you where a new point begins. Start a new line in your notes at each one.
- **Write key words, not sentences**: nouns, verbs and numbers. Use symbols: → (leads to), ≠ (is different from), + / − (for / against), ? (doubtful), ! (important).
- **Use two columns**: the speaker's points on the left, examples and evidence on the right.
- **After listening**, take two minutes to complete your notes and write one sentence that sums up the speaker's position.

The method works in every subject: a history lesson, a science lecture, a talk in Italian or in Latin class. Compare notes with a partner: what did one of you miss?

### 13.5.2 Listening: Is Revenge Ever Justified?

After reading *Hamlet*, the two classes of the Literature Trail hold an online debate. Mrs Hill chairs it from Bristol; each speaker has two minutes. Elena Conti, from Giulia's class in Turin, speaks for the motion, and Sam Taylor against it. Listen (books closed) while your teacher and classmates read the script (Tabella 13.6), take notes in two columns, then answer the questions in the exercises.

**Tabella 13.6** Listening script — Is revenge ever justified?

| | |
|---|---|
| **Mrs Hill** | Good afternoon, Turin, and welcome, Bristol. Today's motion is: "Revenge is sometimes justified." Elena, you have two minutes. Over to you. |
| **Elena** | Thank you. Imagine your father has been murdered. You know who did it, and the murderer is now the most powerful man in the country. No police officer will arrest him, no judge will try him. What do you do? That is Hamlet's situation. First of all, I want to be clear: I am not saying that revenge is good. I am saying that it can be justified, provided there is no other way to get justice. Moving on to my second point: if a crime goes unpunished, it will happen again. Claudius has already killed once; what if he kills again? In fact, he tries to have Hamlet killed in England. So Hamlet must act — otherwise more people will die. Finally, think of history. Tyrants have fallen because someone decided to act. To sum up: revenge is a last resort, but as long as the law protects the guilty, the victims will take justice into their own hands. Thank you. |
| **Mrs Hill** | Thank you, Elena. Sam, for the opposition. |
| **Sam** | Thanks. Elena makes a strong point, but let's look at what actually happens in the play. Hamlet wants revenge for one death. By the end, eight people are dead, including Hamlet, his mother and Ophelia, who had done nothing wrong. That's what revenge does: it spreads. Laertes wants revenge for his father, so he poisons a sword. Revenge makes good people do terrible things. Secondly, even if you are sure you're right, you can be wrong. Hamlet himself wonders whether the Ghost is a devil. Suppose he had killed an innocent man? Justice needs evidence and a judge; revenge needs |

| | |
|---|---|
| | only anger. And last but not least, justice and revenge are not the same thing. Justice ends a story; revenge starts the next one. So I'm asking you to vote against the motion. Thank you. |
| **Mrs Hill** | Thank you both. Turin, Bristol: you have one minute to make your decision. Please vote now. |

### 13.5.3 Speaking: giving a short presentation

A good presentation is easy to follow because the speaker tells the audience where they are going: this is **signposting** (*segnaletica del discorso*), the use of words and phrases that show the structure of a talk. A persuasive presentation also uses the techniques that Antony knew: the rule of three, rhetorical questions and repetition.

**Tabella 13.7** Useful language — giving a presentation

| Function | Phrases |
|---|---|
| Opening | *Good morning, everyone. · Today I'd like to talk about… · Have you ever wondered…?* |
| Outlining | *I'll divide my talk into three parts. · First I'll…, then…, and finally…* |
| Signposting | *First of all… · Moving on to… · Let's now turn to… · Another important point is… · Finally…* |
| Giving examples | *For example… · Take… · A good illustration of this is…* |
| Persuading | *Think about it: … · Isn't it time we…? · We can…, we must…, and we will… · Imagine…* |
| Concluding | *To sum up… · So, to conclude… · Thank you for listening. Are there any questions?* |

1. **Pair work.** Prepare a two-minute presentation on one of these topics: *Hamlet's biggest mistake*; *Was Brutus a hero or a traitor?*; *A speech that changed history*. Use an opening, three points with signposts, and a conclusion. Your partner notes the signposts you use.
2. **Group work.** In groups of three, choose a cause in your school (more sport, a quiet study room, less plastic) and give a one-minute persuasive presentation. Use at least one rule of three, one rhetorical question and one repetition. The class votes for the most convincing speaker.

### 13.5.4 Writing: a speech

A speech is written to be heard. At B2 a good speech has a clear audience and purpose, a hook in the first sentence, a few strong points with signposts, rhetorical devices that help the listener remember, and a final call to action: it tells the audience what to do. After the online debate, Giulia wrote this speech for her school's student assembly.

**Tabella 13.8** Model text — a speech

| **Let's Talk: a Debate Club for Our School** |
|---|
| Good morning, everyone. How many times have you had an opinion in class and kept it to yourself? Last month our class took part in an online debate with students in Bristol, and I discovered something: arguing well is a skill, and it can be learnt. |
| So today I'd like to propose a debate club, and I have three reasons. First of all, debating makes you think. To defend an idea, you have to understand the opposite one. Secondly, it gives you confidence. Speaking to a hundred people is frightening the first time, the second time a little less, and the tenth time it's exciting. Finally, it prepares us for the future: for university, for job interviews and for the oral of the *esame di maturità*. |
| Some of you may think: "I'm too shy." Exactly! That's why you should come. Nobody has to speak in the first weeks, as long as they listen. And if time is a problem, don't worry: we would meet only once a fortnight, after lessons, with the dates on the noticeboard in case you forget. |
| Shakespeare gave Mark Antony a crowd and one speech, and he changed the history of Rome. We are asking for one room, one teacher and one hour. |
| So, to sum up: a debate club would make us better thinkers, braver speakers and more active citizens. If you agree, sign the list outside the library before Friday. Let's stop keeping our opinions to ourselves. Let's talk. Thank you. (247 words) |

**Structure.** Title → hook (a rhetorical question) and a personal story → the proposal and three reasons with signposts (*first of all, secondly, finally*) → an objection answered (*Some of you may think…*) → a memorable image (Antony) → summary with a rule of three and a call to action. **Language.** Direct address (*you, we, let's*), short sentences, repetition (*one room, one teacher and one hour*), alternatives to *if* (*as long as, in case*).

**Checklist.** ✓ a clear audience and purpose · ✓ a hook in the first two sentences · ✓ two or three points, each with a signpost · ✓ at least one objection answered · ✓ rule of three, rhetorical question, repetition · ✓ a call to action · ✓ spoken register: direct, short sentences, no lists of numbers · ✓ 200–250 words. **Task.** Write a speech (200–250 words) for your school assembly or the Literature Trail blog to persuade your classmates to support a project: a school garden, a book swap, a theatre trip, a charity event. Research tip: if you quote a figure (how much plastic a school uses, how many students read for pleasure), take it from an official source and say where it comes from.

## 13.6 Connections: Princes, Courtiers and Tyrants

### 13.6.1 Hamlet and the perfect courtier

In chapter 8 you met Baldassarre Castiglione's *Libro del Cortegiano* (1528), translated into English by Thomas Hoby in 1561. Castiglione's courtier is above all a soldier, but he is also a man of letters (text of the Le Monnier edition, Florence 1854, from it.wikisource):

> *«estimo che la principale e vera profession del Cortegiano debba esser quella dell'arme»* (I, 17) … *«voglio che nelle lettere sia più che mediocremente erudito, almeno in questi studii che chiamamo d'umanità»* (I, 44)
>
> — Baldassarre Castiglione, *Il libro del Cortegiano*

("I think that the principal and true profession of the courtier must be that of arms … I want him to be more than moderately learned in letters, at least in the studies that we call the humanities": translation by the editors.) Ophelia's lament for Hamlet — "The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword" — sums up the same ideal in one line: the eye of the courtier, the tongue of the scholar, the sword of the soldier (the order of the nouns is crossed). Hamlet is the Renaissance prince that Castiglione describes, and the play shows what happens to that ideal in a corrupt court, where every word is spied on and every gesture may be a mask.

### 13.6.2 The Machiavel on the English stage

Machiavelli's *Principe* (chapter 8) was known in England mostly by reputation, and the reputation was dark. On the Elizabethan stage "Machiavel" became the name of a type: the **Machiavel** (*il machiavellico*), a villain who plans crimes coldly, deceives everyone and explains his tricks to the audience. Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* is introduced by a character called Machevil; in *Henry VI, Part 3* the future Richard III boasts that he can "set the murderous Machiavel to school" (III.2). Machiavelli had written something more subtle — that a prince must know how to seem good (text of the 1814 edition, from it.wikisource):

> *«è necessario questa natura saperla bene colorire, ed essere gran simulatore e dissimulatore [...] Ognuno vede quel che tu pari; pochi sentono quel che tu sei»*
>
> — Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, XVIII

("It is necessary to know how to disguise this nature well, and to be a great pretender and dissembler … Everyone sees what you seem; few feel what you are": translation by the editors.) Seeming and being is exactly the problem of *Hamlet*. Claudius smiles and is a murderer; Hamlet, on the contrary, tells his mother: "Seems, madam! nay it is; I know not 'seems'" (I.2). The Machiavellian court of Elsinore is a world in which only appearances count, and a young man who wants to be what he seems cannot survive.

### 13.6.3 Two Romes

For Shakespeare, Brutus is "the noblest Roman of them all", an idealist who kills his friend for the republic. For Dante, three centuries earlier, he was one of the three worst sinners in history. At the very bottom of Hell, Lucifer chews in his three mouths Judas, who betrayed Christ, and Brutus and Cassius, who betrayed Caesar, founder of the empire (text of the Petrocchi edition, from it.wikisource):

*De li altri due c'hanno il capo di sotto,*
*quel che pende dal nero ceffo è Bruto:*
*vedi come si storce, e non fa motto!;*
*e l'altro è Cassio, che par sì membruto.*
— Dante, *Inferno* XXXIV, 64–67

("Of the other two, who have their heads below, the one who hangs from the black muzzle is Brutus: see how he writhes, and says no word; and the other is Cassius, who looks so strong-limbed": translation by the editors.) Dante saw the empire as willed by God, so the killers of Caesar were traitors to the order of the world; Shakespeare, writing for a queen who had no heir and a people afraid of civil war, made the same act a tragedy of good intentions. The Danish legend behind *Hamlet* had travelled too: from Saxo Grammaticus's Latin to Belleforest's French and to the London stage, as Italian novelle travelled to *Romeo and Juliet* (chapter 12).

**COLLEGAMENTI**

**History and science: Wittenberg.** Hamlet and Horatio are students at Wittenberg, in Saxony — the same university as Marlowe's Faustus (chapter 10). For an English audience around 1600 the name meant one thing above all: Martin Luther, professor there, published his 95 theses against indulgences in 1517 and began the Protestant Reformation. A prince from Wittenberg is a prince of the new age of questioning, of reading and arguing for yourself.

The age was questioning the heavens too. In 1543 Nicolaus Copernicus published *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*, which put the Sun, not the Earth, at the centre of the planets' orbits; a young mathematician from Wittenberg, Georg Joachim Rheticus, had visited him and encouraged him to publish. In 1600 most people still believed in the old picture of the universe, with the Earth at the centre and the stars fixed on spheres. Hamlet's "this most excellent canopy, the air" and "this majestical roof fretted with golden fire" belong to that old picture; we cannot know what Shakespeare thought of the new one, and the play does not say.

**Try it:** on a timeline, place Luther's theses (1517), Copernicus's book (1543), the Armada (1588) and *Hamlet* (c. 1600). How many years separate the beginning of the Reformation from Hamlet's Wittenberg?

1. Castiglione wants the courtier to be a soldier and a scholar. Which of Hamlet's actions in the play show the soldier, and which the scholar?
2. Choose a character from an Italian text you have studied who "seems" one thing and "is" another. Compare him or her with Claudius.
3. Research task: on the website of the British Library, find the page on the First Folio or on the quartos of *Hamlet*. Write 60–80 words on what you learn. Check that the information comes from the library, not from a copied page.

## SINTESI

- In the 1590s Elizabeth I, old and childless, refused to name an heir; the succession was a dangerous question.
- War, bad harvests and the war in Ireland marked the decade; Essex, back from Ireland in disgrace, led a failed rising on 8 February 1601 and was executed; his supporters had paid for a performance of *Richard II* the day before.
- History plays dramatised English reigns from chronicles (Hall, Holinshed) and let audiences reflect on power at a safe distance.
- The Tudor myth: Richard II's deposition (1399) led to civil war, ended by Henry VII at Bosworth (1485); Richard III was its villain.
- Shakespeare wrote two tetralogies: *Henry VI* 1–3 and *Richard III* (c. 1591–93); *Richard II*, *Henry IV* 1–2 and *Henry V* (c. 1595–99).
- *Julius Caesar* (1599) comes from Plutarch in North's translation (1579); the forum scene opposes Brutus's prose to Antony's verse — rhetoric, with ethos, pathos and logos.
- Tragedy (Aristotle): a serious action that arouses pity and fear (catharsis); the tragic hero falls through *hamartia*. Senecan tragedy added ghosts, revenge and horror.
- *Hamlet* (c. 1600–01; Q1 1603, Q2 1604–05, F 1623): the Ghost, revenge and delay, madness real and feigned, the play within the play, the soliloquy as thought made audible.
- T1: Antony's speech uses the rule of three, irony and rhetorical questions; T2: "To be, or not to be" weighs life against death; T3: Hamlet praises and rejects man.
- Alternatives to *if*: *provided / as long as / on condition that* (only if), *in case* (precaution), *suppose / what if*, *otherwise*, *even if* (≠ *even though*), *unless*; no *will* after them.
- Castiglione's courtier, Machiavelli's seeming and being, and Dante's Brutus help us read Hamlet, Claudius and the conspirators of *Julius Caesar*.

## ESERCIZI

### History and Literature

1. ● Why was the succession a dangerous subject in the 1590s?
   - **A.** Elizabeth had several children who fought for the crown.
   - **B.** Elizabeth refused to name an heir, and raising the question openly could lead to prison.
   - **C.** Parliament had already chosen the Earl of Essex.
   - **D.** James VI of Scotland had declared war on England.

2. ● What did Essex's supporters ask the Lord Chamberlain's Men to perform the day before the rising?

   **A.** *Henry V*

   **B.** *Julius Caesar*

   **C.** *Hamlet*

   **D.** *Richard II*

3. ● In Aristotle's *Poetics*, *hamartia* is…

   **A.** the error or mistake of judgement that causes the hero's fall.

   **B.** the release of pity and fear in the audience.

   **C.** the actor who speaks the prologue.

   **D.** the five-part shape of a tragic plot.

4. ● True or false? Correct the false statements. a Shakespeare wrote the plays about the Wars of the Roses before the plays about Richard II and Henry IV. b Holinshed's *Chronicles* were Shakespeare's main source for Roman history. c A Swiss traveller probably saw *Julius Caesar* at the Globe in 1599. d In the forum scene Brutus speaks in blank verse and Antony in prose. e *Hamlet* survives in a single early printed text. f Richard III's skeleton was found in Leicester in 2012.

5. ●● Match each play (1–5) with its subject (a–e) and its date (i–v). 1 *Richard II* · 2 *Henry V* · 3 *Richard III* · 4 *Julius Caesar* · 5 *Hamlet* — a the murder of a Roman statesman · b a prince of Denmark avenges his father · c a king is deposed · d a victory over the French · e the last king of York is defeated at Bosworth — i c. 1592–93 · ii c. 1595 · iii 1599 (Plutarch) · iv 1599 (Agincourt) · v c. 1600–01

6. ●● Explain each term in one or two sentences in your own words: a history play · b tetralogy · c Tudor myth · d catharsis · e play within the play · f Machiavel.

7. ●●● Answer in 40–60 words. a Why could a performance of *Richard II* worry the queen's government in February 1601? b Why do Shakespeare's history plays depend on the audience's imagination? c Give two possible reasons why Hamlet delays his revenge.

### Text Analysis

8. ● In T1, why does Antony keep saying that Brutus is "an honourable man"?

   **A.** Because he sincerely admires Brutus.

   **B.** Because the crowd asks him to repeat it.

   **C.** Because he has promised not to blame the conspirators, and uses the praise ironically.

   **D.** Because it was a formula used in every Roman funeral.

9. ●● T1. Find in the extract: a a rule of three · b a rhetorical question · c two facts that show Caesar was not ambitious · d the line in which Antony presents himself as Caesar's friend · e a metaphor that compares character to a material.

10. ●● T2. Paraphrase ll. 1–5 in modern English (two or three sentences).

11. ●● Scansion. Copy T2, l. 1 (*To be, or not to be, that is the question*). Divide it into syllables, mark the stressed syllables in CAPITALS and the feet with |. How many syllables does it have, and what is the name of the variation?

12. ●● T3. Complete the table: what does Hamlet praise, and what does it become? a the earth → … · b the air, “this most excellent canopy” → … · c the sky, “this majestical roof” → … · d man, “the paragon of animals” → …

13. ●●● Compare T2 and T3 (80–100 words). In which passage does Hamlet think about death, and in which about the world and man? What do the two passages have in common?

14. ●●● Write a PEE paragraph (80–100 words) on this point: “Antony persuades the crowd by appearing not to persuade it.”

### Language

15. ● Choose the correct expression. a I’ll lend you my notes as long as / in case you give them back tomorrow. b Take an umbrella in case / provided it rains. c Hurry up, otherwise / unless we’ll miss the start. d Even if / Even though he was tired, Sam stayed for the whole debate. e Brutus let Antony speak on condition that / in case he didn’t blame the conspirators. f What if / Otherwise the Ghost is lying?

16. ● *In case*, *in case of* or *if*? a I’ll write the date in my diary _____ I forget it. b _____ you see Elena, say hello from me. c Take some money _____ you need a taxi. d _____ fire, do not use the lifts. e Call me _____ you need help with the essay — I’ll come at once.

17. ●● You can borrow my copy of *Hamlet* _____ you don’t write in it.

    **A.** in case
    **B.** even if
    **C.** otherwise
    **D.** as long as

18. ●● Rewrite the sentences with the words in brackets. a You can come to the rehearsal only if you sit at the back. (provided) b If we don’t start now, we won’t finish. (otherwise) c Imagine Brutus had refused to join Cassius. What would have happened? (what if) d I’ll take a pen because I might need to sign something. (in case) e They will let you in only if you show your ticket. (on condition that) f If you don’t practise, you won’t improve. (unless)

19. ●● Complete with *even if* or *even though*. a _____ Hamlet knew the truth, he did not act. b I’d go to the Globe _____ it rained all evening. c _____ Antony praised Brutus, he was really attacking him. d _____ you hated Shakespeare, you’d enjoy this production. e _____ the rising was small and brief, Essex was executed.

20. ●● Find and correct the mistake in each sentence (✗). a ✗ Take a jacket in case it will be cold. b ✗ As long as you will listen, I'll explain. c ✗ Unless you don't study, you'll fail. d ✗ In case you see Callum, give him this book. e ✗ Even if it was late, we kept talking. f ✗ Supposing he would refuse, what would we do?

21. ●● Build sentences from the prompts. a Hamlet / not act / unless / be sure / the Ghost / tell the truth (present) · b Horatio / follow / Hamlet / in case / he / need help (past) · c What if / Laertes / not poison / the sword? (past, impossible) · d We / must leave now; otherwise / miss / the coach · e You / can use my laptop / as long as / save / your work on a USB stick

22. ●●● Translate into English. a Puoi venire alla prova, purché tu arrivi in orario. b Porta il copione, nel caso il regista voglia cambiare qualcosa. c Anche se Amleto avesse ucciso il re nel terzo atto, la sua tragedia non sarebbe finita. d E se il fantasma fosse un diavolo?

23. ●● Listening "Is Revenge Ever Justified?" (Tabella 13.6). Answer the questions. a What is the motion of the debate? b What are Elena's three arguments? c Which signposts does she use to introduce them? d What are Sam's three arguments? e Find in the script four alternatives to *if*. f Which side would you vote for, and why?

### Vocabulary

24. ● Complete with the words in the box: *ambitious · appealed · betrayed · conspiracy · convinced · crowd · overthrow · power*. In 1601 the Earl of Essex, proud and _____, planned a _____ against the queen's advisers. He hoped to _____ his enemies and take _____, and he _____ to the Londoners for help. But the _____ did not follow him, and some friends _____ him. Nobody was _____ that he was fighting for the queen.

25. ●● *Make* or *take*? Complete with the correct form. a Hamlet can't _____ a decision. b In a debate you must _____ sides. c Antony _____ a speech at the funeral. d Laertes wants to _____ revenge. e It's time to _____ action. f Elena _____ a very good point. g Who will _____ responsibility for the trip? h Please _____ an effort to be on time.

26. ●● Word families. Complete with a noun or an adjective, then use four of the words in sentences of your own. a persuade → (noun) … · (adjective) … · b power → (adjective, +) … · (adjective, –) … · c ambition → (adjective) … · d conspire → (noun, the plan) … · (noun, the person) … · e betray → (noun) … · f rhetoric → (adjective) … · g convince → (adjective) …

### Writing and Speaking

27. ●● Write a speech (200–250 words) for your school assembly or the Literature Trail blog to persuade your classmates to support a project of your choice. Follow the model, the structure and the checklist in the Writing section.

28. ●● Presentation. Prepare and give a two-minute presentation: “Was Brutus a hero or a traitor?”. Use an opening, three signposted points with one example each, and a conclusion. Your classmates take notes in two columns.

29. ●●● Debate. In groups of four, debate the motion “Hamlet should have killed Claudius at once.” Two students speak for, two against; each speaks for one minute, then each side gives a 30-second reply. Use alternatives to *if* and at least one persuasive technique.

### Towards B2

30. ●● Multiple-choice cloze. Choose the correct answer (A, B, C or D) for each gap. Early in February 1601 a group of gentlemen (1) _____ the actors at the Globe to perform *Richard II*. The actors replied that the play was so old that few people would (2) _____ to see it, but they agreed to perform it (3) _____ they were paid extra. The next day the Earl of Essex led his followers into the City, (4) _____ that the Londoners would join him. (5) _____ , nobody did. Within three weeks he had been tried and (6) _____ . — 1 A said B asked C suggested D proposed · 2 A arrive B reach C come D attend · 3 A unless B in case C even if D provided · 4 A hope B hoped C to hope D hoping · 5 A Although B However C Despite D Unless · 6 A execute B execution C executing D executed

31. ●● Open cloze. Write ONE word in each gap. *Hamlet* is one (1) _____ the most performed plays in the world. (2) _____ if you have never seen it, you probably know a few of its lines. The prince must avenge his father, (3) _____ he delays for most of the play. Some critics think he hesitates because he is not sure the Ghost is telling the truth; (4) _____ think he simply cannot kill. Whatever the reason, the play would end in Act III (5) _____ Hamlet acted at once. Actors love the role (6) _____ it allows them to show a mind at work, and audiences come back again and again, (7) _____ though they know how it ends.

32. ●●● Word formation cloze. Use the word in brackets to form a word that fits the gap. Antony is a (1) _____ (persuade) speaker. Pretending to praise the (2) _____ (conspire), he reminds the crowd of Caesar’s (3) _____ (generous) and asks whether such a man could be (4) _____ (ambition). His (5) _____ (rhetoric) questions and his (6) _____ (emotion) pauses turn the people’s (7) _____ (loyal) from Brutus to Caesar. Few speeches in literature are so (8) _____ (power).

33. ●●● Key-word transformation. Complete the second sentence so that it means the same as the first. Use the word in bold and between two and five words. a You can stay only if you are quiet. **LONG** → You can stay _____ quiet. b I’ll take my notes because the teacher might ask questions. **CASE** → I’ll take my notes _____ questions. c If we don’t leave now, we’ll be late. **OTHERWISE** → We must leave now, _____ late. d Imagine you met Shakespeare: what would you ask him? **SUPPOSING** → _____ Shakespeare, what would you ask him? e It doesn’t matter whether it rains: the play will go on. **EVEN** → The play will go on _____ . f The actors agreed to perform, but only if they received extra money. **CONDITION** → The actors agreed to perform _____ extra money.

## PER APPROFONDIRE

- [NOR] S. Greenblatt (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, vol. B: the introductions to Shakespeare, to *Hamlet* and to the history plays.
- [OXS] S. Wells, G. Taylor (eds), *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*: the introductions to *Richard II*, *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*, with the chronology of the plays.
- [SAN] A. Sanders, *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*: the chapter on Shakespeare's histories and tragedies.
- [ABR] M. H. Abrams, G. G. Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*: the entries on tragedy, *hamartia*, catharsis and Freytag's pyramid (under "plot").
- [SWA] M. Swan, *Practical English Usage*: the entries on *if*, *in case*, *provided*, *suppose* and *even if / even though*.

# Glossario del capitolo

**Catharsis**
*catarsi* — in Aristotle, the release or purification of pity and fear that tragedy produces in the audience.

**Conspiracy**
*congiura* — a secret plan by a group to do something harmful or illegal, such as killing or overthrowing a ruler.

**Ethos, pathos, logos**
*ethos, pathos, logos* — in Aristotle, the three ways to persuade: the speaker's character, the listeners' feelings, reasoning.

**Freytag's pyramid**
*piramide di Freytag* — a diagram of a plot in five parts: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, catastrophe.

**Hamartia**
*errore tragico* — in Aristotle, the mistake or error of judgement that causes the hero's fall (often read as a "tragic flaw").

**History play**
*dramma storico* — a play that dramatises the reign of an English king, using events taken from the chronicles.

**In case**
*nel caso che, per precauzione* — introduces a reason for a precaution: *Take a coat in case it rains* (≠ *if*).

**Machiavel**
*il «machiavellico»* — on the Elizabethan stage, a cold, deceitful villain inspired by the popular image of Machiavelli.

**Play within the play**
*teatro nel teatro* — a performance staged by characters for other characters inside a play.

**Rhetoric**
*retorica* — the art of speaking or writing in order to persuade.

**Rule of three**
*regola del tre* — a list of three words or phrases that sounds complete and memorable: "Friends, Romans, countrymen".

**Senecan tragedy**
*tragedia senecana* — tragedy on the model of Seneca: five acts, ghosts, revenge, horror and long rhetorical speeches.

**Signposting**
*segnaletica del discorso* — words and phrases that show the structure of a talk: *first of all, moving on to, to sum up*.

**Succession**
*successione (al trono)* — who inherits the crown when a ruler dies; in the 1590s Elizabeth I refused to name an heir.

**Tetralogy**
*tetralogia* — a group of four plays that tell one continuous story.

**Tragedy**
*tragedia* — a serious play in which the main character moves from happiness to disaster, usually to death.

**Tragic hero**
*eroe tragico* — a great but imperfect figure whose fall is caused by an error of judgement.

**Tudor myth**
*mito Tudor* — the Tudor view of the 15th century: the deposition of Richard II led to civil war, ended by Henry VII in 1485.

# Soluzioni

**1.** B.

**2.** D.

**3.** A.

**4.** a T · b F — they were his main source for English history; for Rome he used Plutarch (North's translation) · c T · d F — Brutus speaks in prose, Antony in blank verse · e F — there are three early texts: Q1 (1603), Q2 (1604–05) and the First Folio (1623) · f T.

**5.** 1 c ii · 2 d iv · 3 e i · 4 a iii · 5 b v.

**6.** Model answers: a a play about the reign of an English king, based on real events taken from the chronicles · b a group of four plays that tell one continuous story (Shakespeare wrote two on English history) · c the Tudor historians' version of the 15th century: Richard II's deposition brought civil war as a punishment, and Henry VII's victory in 1485 brought peace; Richard III was its villain · d in Aristotle, the release or purification of pity and fear that tragedy produces in the audience · e a performance staged by characters for other characters inside a play, like "The Mousetrap" in *Hamlet* · f a stage villain inspired by the popular image of Machiavelli: a cold, deceitful plotter who explains his tricks to the audience.

**7.** Model answers: a The play shows a king being forced to give up his crown. Essex's men paid for it the day before the rising, probably to make the idea of removing a ruler familiar to Londoners; a queen with no heir and powerful enemies could read it as a comment on her own reign ("I am Richard II"). · b The stage was almost bare: battles, horses and whole countries had to be represented by a few actors. The Chorus of *Henry V* asks the audience to "piece out our imperfections" with their thoughts, so imagination completes the performance. · c Possible reasons: he is not sure the Ghost is honest (it may be a devil); he thinks too much and cannot turn thought into action; killing is against his nature or his conscience; when he finds Claudius praying, he fears sending him to heaven. Readings differ: any two, explained, are acceptable.

**8.** C.

**9.** a "Friends, Romans, countrymen" (l. 1) · b "Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?" (l. 18) · c he brought prisoners home whose ransoms filled the public treasury (ll. 16–17); he wept when the poor cried (l. 19) · d "He was my friend, faithful and just to me" (l. 13) · e "Ambition should be made of sterner stuff" (l. 20).

**10.** Model answer: Antony asks the Romans to listen to him: he has come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. People's bad actions are remembered after their death, while their good actions are often forgotten and buried with them; it will be the same with Caesar. Brutus has said that Caesar was ambitious.

**11.** to BE | or NOT | to BE | that IS | the QUES | tion — 11 syllables: five iambic feet and an extra unstressed syllable at the end, a feminine ending. (Some actors stress *that* rather than *is*; the five beats remain.)

**12.** a "a sterile promontory" · b, c "a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours" · d "this quintessence of dust".

**13.** Model answer: In T2 Hamlet thinks about death: he wonders whether it is better to suffer or to die, and stops at the fear of what may come after. In T3 he speaks about the world and man: the universe and humanity are wonderful, but to him they are only vapours and dust. Both passages show a mind that reasons carefully and then turns against its own conclusion ("ay, there's the rub", "And yet"). Both are general rather than personal — "we", "man" — and both express a deep melancholy. T2 is in verse and spoken alone; T3 is in prose and spoken to two spies.

**14.** Model answer: Point: Antony convinces the crowd while pretending that he is not trying to convince it. Evidence: he begins "I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him" and keeps repeating that "Brutus is an honourable man". Explanation: by presenting himself as a grieving friend who obeys Brutus's conditions, he lowers the crowd's defences; then he places simple facts — the ransoms, Caesar's tears for the poor — next to the praise of Brutus, so that the listeners draw the conclusion themselves. A conclusion we reach on our own feels like our own, and that is why it is so powerful.

**15.** a as long as · b in case · c otherwise · d Even though · e on condition that · f What if.

**16.** a in case · b If · c in case · d In case of · e if.

**17.** D.

**18.** a You can come to the rehearsal provided (that) you sit at the back. · b We must (have to) start now; otherwise we won't finish. · c What if Brutus had refused to join Cassius? (What would have happened?) · d I'll take a pen in case I need to sign something. · e They will let you in on condition that you show your ticket. · f Unless you practise, you won't improve (You won't improve unless you practise).

**19.** a Even though · b even if · c Even though · d Even if · e Even though.

**20.** a in case it is (it's) cold · b As long as you listen · c Unless you study · d If you see Callum · e Even though it was late · f Supposing he refused.

**21.** a Hamlet won't act unless he is sure the Ghost is telling the truth. · b Horatio followed Hamlet in case he needed help. · c What if Laertes hadn't poisoned the sword? · d We must leave now; otherwise we'll miss the coach. · e You can use my laptop as long as you save your work on a USB stick.

**22.** a You can come to the rehearsal provided (that) / as long as you arrive on time. · b Bring the script in case the director wants to change something. · c Even if Hamlet had killed the king in the third act, his tragedy wouldn't have ended. · d What if the ghost is (were) a devil?

**23.** a "Revenge is sometimes justified." · b It can be justified when there is no other way to get justice (the murderer is protected by power); an unpunished crime will happen again; in history tyrants fell because someone acted. · c first of all, moving on to my second point, finally, to sum up · d Revenge spreads and kills innocent people (eight die in *Hamlet*); you can be wrong even if you are sure; justice needs evidence and a judge and ends a story, revenge starts the next one. · e provided, what if, otherwise, as long as (Elena); even if, suppose (Sam) · f open: the answer should refer to at least one argument from each speaker.

**24.** ambitious · conspiracy · overthrow · power · appealed · crowd · betrayed · convinced.

**25.** a make · b take · c made · d take · e take · f made · g take · h make.

**26.** a persuasion, persuasive · b powerful, powerless · c ambitious · d conspiracy, conspirator · e betrayal · f rhetorical · g convincing (also convinced). Sentences: open.

**27.** Model answer (about 220 words): a speech following the model — a title, a hook (a question or a short story), the proposal, two or three signposted reasons, one objection answered, a rule of three, a rhetorical question and repetition, a summary and a call to action. Marking: content and structure (checklist), persuasive devices, register suitable for listeners, at least two alternatives to *if*, accuracy, 200–250 words.

**28.** Model answer (outline): "Good morning. Today I'd like to ask a simple question: was Brutus a hero or a traitor? First of all, his motive: he loved Rome more than Caesar — he killed for the republic, not for himself. Moving on to his method: he killed a friend who trusted him; for Dante that makes him one of the worst traitors in history. Finally, the result: civil war, and the end of the republic he wanted to save. To sum up, I think Brutus was an honourable man who did a terrible thing — a tragic hero. Thank you." Assess: clear structure, signposts, one example per point, eye contact, pace.

**29.** Open. Assess: arguments relevant to the play (e.g. for: Claudius would have died before killing others; against: Hamlet was not sure of his guilt, and a murder at prayer was against his conscience),

clear turns, rebuttal of the other side, alternatives to *if* (*provided, even if, what if, otherwise*), a persuasive device.

**30.** 1 B · 2 C · 3 D · 4 D · 5 B · 6 D.

**31.** 1 of · 2 Even · 3 but (yet) · 4 others · 5 if · 6 because (as, since) · 7 even.

**32.** 1 persuasive · 2 conspirators · 3 generosity · 4 ambitious · 5 rhetorical · 6 emotional · 7 loyalty · 8 powerful.

**33.** a as long as you are (as long as you keep) · b in case the teacher asks · c otherwise we will (we'll) be · d Supposing you met (Supposing you could meet) · e even if it rains · f on condition that they received (got).