Literary Criticism in New Media: A critical analysis of the website Television Tropes and Idioms and the place of literature in digital culture

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Abstract | The aim of this thesis is to present and critically assess the website Television Tropes and Idioms (commonly known as TV Tropes, located at www.tvtropes.org), and to describe how it might be inserted into the context of literary theory and criticism, as well as show how it displays the characteristic features of New Media and indicates a possible place for literature in digital culture.

The website catalogues recurring patterns and conventions in literature and entertainment media. Included in its analysis is an examination of the term 'trope' and a demonstration of the website literary critical method with the help of William Shakespeare's Hamlet. This thesis argues that TV Tropes is a digital age continuation of existing literary traditions (namely Russian formalism and archetypal literary criticism), as well as having been foreshadowed by Umberto Eco in his essay Casablanca: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage. The website appropriates these literary theories to the postmodern, an aspect which is also discussed in great detail.

The second aspect discussed is from a New Media and digital culture point of view. As a website with a solid literary foundation (as it has been proven in this thesis), TV Tropes can be used to discover and discuss the present and future of literature in the electronic 'public sphere' and amidst the emerging 'collective intelligence communities'.
Chapter One

Introduction: celebrating fiction on the Internet

“Tropes transcend television. They reflect life.” (TV Tropes)

Ever since the 1991 launch of the World Wide Web (or the Internet as we know it today), the online migration of all aspects of life has been continuous and seemingly unstoppable, and literature is no exception. As Lisa Rapaport reported, in May 2011, Amazon announced that their sales of electronic books surpassed that of printed versions for the very first time in the history of the site. The discussion of literature has also followed through with what might be called electronic book clubs: countless forums, mailing lists, online encyclopaedias and literary websites were created and are still being created with the intention of discussing, analysing and critiquing literature. Now, there are virtually no known past authors who are not discussed somewhere online (Browner, Pulsford, and Sears 5).

Around the turn of the century, the development of Web 2.0 technologies began, and a new vision materialised regarding the future possibilities of the Internet, which meant a viable new direction for literature as well. The key concept was a new type of openness, encouraging user participation and generation of content, which would also result in the accumulation of unimaginable amounts of data (Anderson, What Is Web 2.0?).

The main subject of this paper, the website Television Tropes and Idioms (currently located at www.tvtropes.org) is a part of this new generation of web content. The site identifies itself as a “catalog of the tricks of the trade of writing fiction;” with the help of examples, it discusses in detail the many ways these “tropes” can be – and were – used. It began as a wiki site created by non-professionals analysing television series, however, it was soon expanded to include in its scope all entertainment media, as well as all traditions of literature, in- and outside the circle of academic canon. I propose that it can be regarded as a literary website with a valid literary approach, which is worthy of critical attention. It shows the transformation that literature is undergoing now due to the spreading postmodern ideology and the advancement and spread of digital innovations and online technologies.

After introducing the website, I will take a closer look at the word ‘trope’ and how it is used on TV Tropes, drawing a parallel with a similar concept described by Umberto Eco. In the last section, I will give an overview of the TV Tropes analysis of William Shakespeare's Hamlet to illustrate the method and the unusual but accurate results this analysis yields. The literary merit of the website stems from the fact that it bases its framework for analysis on long-standing traditions of literary criticism, but appropriates these approaches to the postmodern. I will explore these notions in Chapter 3, unravelling the literary foundations of TV Tropes and discussing the framework's postmodern features in detail.

For this postmodern literary approach to develop, the Internet was a key component. It played a crucial part in the implementation of this idea, and TV Tropes became an excellent example of what form literary criticism can take on the Internet and what new possibilities New Media might have in store for literature. I will discuss these implications in further detail, as well as bring evidence as to why TV Tropes is a worthwhile and emblematic example of literary criticism in New Media, and how it shows the influence of dominant theories of present day digital culture.
Chapter Two

TVTropes.Org

“We should distinguish between more or less universal narrative functions à la Propp, visual stereotypes like the Cynic Adventurer, and more complex archetypical situations like the Unhappy Love. I hope someone will do this job…” (Umberto Eco)

2.1 The basics

The website Television Tropes and Idioms, more widely known by its shorter name TV Tropes was created in April 2004 by a group of friends, all fans of the television series Buffy the Vampire Slayer. By that time, they had been discussing and analysing the series for a long time on the website Buffistas, and it was during these online conversations that they began identifying “tropes” on television. As there was no place where these common motifs of popular culture could be collected – no such list as the one that Umberto Eco wished for – three of the forum members decided to create one on their own (Newitz).

Thus, TV Tropes was born, an online encyclopaedia, which allows open collaboration among its contributors (the “tropers”): anyone can add pages, and edit or delete existing ones. Registration is needed for access, but it is free and instant. On the site, each trope and each work has its own page: these contain a short description and a list of examples, often with comments and explanations from tropers. Every item on the lists and in general every mention of a trope or work on any page has a hyperlink to its own separate page, providing instant access, and creating an elaborate intertextual network. For easier navigation, all tropes and works are also categorised based on a variety of criteria.

A core thesis of the site is that There Is No Such Thing As Notability, meaning that every addition is valid, every work is notable; tropers do not have to produce a respected source to prove their statement, as they are the “literary critics” TV Tropes relies on.

2.2 Trope defined

The word ‘trope’ originates from the Greek word 'tropos', which means turn, direction, manner or style, as well as already carrying the current meaning of the term: turn or figure of speech. This was the basis for the Latin 'tropus', and the English word 'trope', which appeared in the 1530s, also had the meaning 'figure of speech'.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms says that a trope “uses words in senses beyond their literal meanings,” and gives metaphor, synecdoche and metonymy as examples. The second meaning of the word as common theme or device is a fairly recent creation. TV Tropes denies that it has invented this secondary meaning, and the website cites the Oxford English Dictionary, which also defines a trope as “a significant or recurring theme; a motif.”

The definition TV Tropes gives for “their trope” is “a conceptual figure of speech, a storytelling shorthand for a concept that the audience will recognize and understand instantly.” It is an umbrella term for all kinds of plot devices, character types, narrative structures, linguistic patterns and so on, and also includes related aspects that are external to the story, such as the “behind-the-scenes aspects of creation, the technical features of a medium, and the fan experience.”

In this explanation, the creators of TV Tropes unknowingly invoked the essay Casablanca: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage, written in 1984 by Italian novelist, semiotician and
literary critic Umberto Eco, in which he analyses the movie *Casablanca* by identifying what he calls “intertextual archetypes.” Eco defines this term as “stereotyped situations derived from preceding textual tradition and recorded by our encyclopedia”: a device similar to a TV Tropes trope.

The three main characteristics of a trope are the same in both definitions. Firstly, intertextual archetypes and tropes alike have what Eco calls a “magic flavour.” If a frame does not have that quality, it does not convey any meaning. TV Tropes brings the example of People Sit On Chairs, which is not a trope as it is “[just a thing that happens] normally or incidentally during the storytelling.”

The second aspect is what Eco describes as a “vague feeling of deja vu.” Tropes can be found and identified by anyone who has seen them before, they are instinctively recognisable. They give a new level of intertextuality to works, i.e. they conjure up other works in the mind of the audience, which have used the same trope. TV Tropes emphasises, however, that the realisation never lessens the experience, never has a detrimental effect on the work. (If it does, the trope is either not well-written, or it is not a trope but a cliché.)

“Works are created by works, texts are created by texts, all together they speak to each other independently of the intention of their authors.” (Eco)

Finally, a trope is not “necessarily universal.” Eco and TV Tropes agree that while there are tropes that are timeless, and will continue to appear in countless works, there are many others that have a different life cycle. Changes in society, technology or any other aspect of human life—a Trope Breaker—can cause a trope to become a Discredited Trope. Others may be outgrown by their own parody tropes, or simply forgotten; nevertheless, the prevalent tropes are also signs of their times.

### 2.3 Hamlet analysed

Most trope examples on the site currently feature entertainment media, however, the number of works of classical literature is increasing. William Shakespeare's plays are among the most detailed literature pages on TV Tropes, partly because he enjoys a special place on the website. Shakespeare is the subject of The Zeroth Law Of Trope Examples, which is a reminder for tropers that for a great number of tropes, a work by Shakespeare is definitely going to be one of the earliest examples, and also one of the most well-known.

This is because, as TV Tropes argues, Shakespeare was one of the greatest Trope Codifiers in literature. Many (seemingly new) tropes can be traced back in their current form to Shakespeare, who often was not the *Trope Maker*, but he gave them a form that ensured their popularity in the coming centuries. T. S. Eliot said of Shakespeare's Hamlet that it is not a standalone play but “it represents the efforts of a series of men, each making what he could out of the work of his predecessors” (Hamlet and His Problems). A similar codification happened in this case as well: Shakespeare was not the original source of the story, but by adding and taking away different tropes, he created a version that became the “new original” and the source for countless adaptations and other works.

On the TV Tropes page for Hamlet, there are over a hundred listed tropes listed about the original play, and the different theatrical and film adaptations alike. In terms of genre, the prominent tropes are *Tragedy* and *Revenge*, which were already basic elements of earlier versions of the Hamlet story. One definite addition made by Shakespeare here is *Kill 'Em All*, which he has used in several of his other tragedies and histories.

The main premise of Hamlet is that the king of Denmark, the father of the protagonist has died suddenly and prematurely, and Hamlet suspects him to have been murdered (*You Killed My Father*). His prime suspect is his uncle, Claudius (*Evil Uncle*), who has also since
the death of the king, married Hamlet’s mother (Comforting The Widow; Sibling Triangle), a deed Hamlet finds to be revolting (Incest Is Relative). Claudius also becomes the new king of Denmark, and his competence to govern is also questioned by his nephew (Sketchy Successor). Hamlet’s suspicions turn out to be right, when his father’s ghost appears to him and tells him what happened (Dead Person Conversation), and he decides to feign madness to take revenge (Obfuscating Insanity).

Hamlet can also be described with tropes, and this analysis might also shed new light on the complexity of the prince’s character. As the main protagonist, he displays the features of two character tropes, the Anti-Hero and the Tragic Hero, shows Black and Gray Morality, and he has a Fatal Flaw, a trope that he basically defines in Act 1, Scene 4. Hamlet also has definite Emo Teen undertones as “a brooding pessimist who dresses all in black and pontificates about suicide”, and his behaviour definitely bears similarities to that of a spoilt teenager at times. He often uses Stealth Insult, and is most definitely a Deadpan Snarker, while at the same time he often needs to convince and encourage himself to act and do what is his duty, without hesitation, playing into the trope Dare to Be Badass.

In terms of style, Shakespeare’s writing in Hamlet is also filled with recognisable patterns. The most evident examples are Added Alliterative Appeal, Hurricane of Puns and the constant Double Entendre. The latter, however, is not always obvious which shows the presence of yet another trope, Get Thee To A Nunnery (named fittingly after the famous line in Hamlet), as most of the risqué content is not understandable to modern audiences without explanation. Tropers have also addressed some of the inconsistencies that appear in Hamlet, for example Anachronism Stew is listed for such things as Hamlet attending a university that was not yet founded at the time the play is set.

A complete list of the tropes identified in Hamlet can be found in Appendix II.
Chapter Three

The Literature Aspect

“Oh, and by the way, Actual Postmodernism is So Last Season these days. We’re up to Nuvo-Retro-Ex-Post-Modernism (Hypocritical Humor) now.” (TV Tropes)

3.1 Foundations

Contrary to first impressions, the methodology of TV Tropes is not unfounded, and similar approaches can be found throughout literary history. Whether called tropes, archetypes or conventions, the identification of such elements and their analysis in literary works has had a long tradition. The emergence of postmodernism in the second half of the 20th century proved the perfect climate for a renewal, and thus TV Tropes was born: a logical postmodern continuation of a significant branch of literary criticism.

3.2 A history

TV Tropes has roots in two distinct literary approaches, Russian Formalism and archetypal literary criticism. Both theories can be dated to the early 20th century, although the conscious use of trope-like devices date back to Ancient Greece, where abstract pantheistic deities had metaphorical reference, and stock characters were already essential elements of Middle Comedy. This concept of recurrent character types later also appeared in morality plays (the stock-allegorical characters of justice, beauty etc.), as well as in commedia dell’arte: the basis of these performances were a set of stock characters and plot devices, with the help of which the actors improvised a complete play. In the Victorian era, authors of stage melodramas were particularly known for working from a set of relatively fixed set of literary building blocks; most plays had a similar plot structure with similar plot point, and they also featured recognisable character types, such as the Stage Irish.

However, the basis for formalist and archetypal theories was completely different. One preliminary source for both was the 12 volume study *The Golden Bough* (1890) by Sir James George Frazer, which points out “archetypal patterns of myth and ritual in the tales and ceremonies of diverse cultures” (Lee 3). Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp's hypothesis was that folktales also had such recurring elements and set out to prove the existence of a common underlying structure. In *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), Propp classifies the actions of the characters of a number of Russian folktales, and differentiates between 31 functions that “exist potentially in all folktales”, and by which all tales can be reconstructed (Onega 266).

A more direct – and acknowledged – predecessor of TV Tropes is archetypal literary criticism that emerged first in the 1930s.

Archetypal criticism focuses on the generic, recurring and conventional elements in literature that cannot be explained as matters of historical influence or tradition. It studies each literary work as part of the whole of literature. This kind of criticism accepts as its informing principle that archetypes - typical images, characters, narrative designs, themes, and other literary phenomena - are present in all literature and so provide the basis for study of its interconnectedness. (Lee 3)
Originally drawing many ideas from psychology (especially Carl Jung) and anthropology (mainly Frazer's work), it was Northrop Frye who later separated the concept of the literary archetype and claimed their conception was irrelevant from a literary standpoint. What is important is that they create an “archetypal interconnectedness”, and this is where the greatness of a literary work stems from (Lee 4).

Archetypal criticism is still widespread, particularly in genre criticism, but mostly as a complement to other methodologies (Lee 4-5). It is a theory fitting the literary culture of today, where popular culture is constantly growing in importance; archetypal criticism can easily include non-traditional canon in its analysis as well (Lee 5).

3.3 Postmodernism in practice

The significance and literary merit of TV Tropes comes from the fact that it makes use of a theory that is fit for the literary and cultural scene of the early 21st century, and mixes it with the dominant ideology of the time. The exact definition of postmodernism, however, still divides scholars. As a starting point, Peter Barry offers a five item list on “what postmodern critics do” (91), which will form the basis of the following sections.

3.3.1 Foregrounding fiction

The first characteristic tendency of the postmodern is the blurring of boundaries in all aspects of the arts. In literature, on the one hand, this means the mixing of genres in sometimes unclear and unexpected ways (Hutcheon 9). TV Tropes allows and encourages the documentation of all the combinations, applauding original and interesting mixtures. Its archetypal methodology is perfectly suitable for showing the “shifting postmodern identities” (Barry 91), and for tracking what is blended with what. The different categorisations of tropes (according to genre, topic and some others, for example there are separate categories for Language Tropes, such as Get Thee To A Nunnery) also help illustrating how versatile a trope can be, and how many different genres and seemingly incompatible themes can be merged. These fusions are so frequent that they prompt the creation of newer and newer tropes; such an example would be Ninja Pirate Zombie Robot trope, which is the basic premise of Pride and Prejudice and Zombies, a popular comic retelling of the Jane Austen classic (which in itself is a typically postmodern novel).

The breakdown of boundaries do not only involve genres but other, more “radical areas” as well. Hutcheon mentions the fiction and non-fiction barrier, which then will inevitably extend to the blurring of art and real life (10). TV Tropes deals with this issue in several different ways. Firstly, there exists a 'work' page titled Real Life with an extensive list of tropes that occur in real life – it is treated as if it was fiction. Similarly, many tropes have real life examples featured alongside the fictional ones, so intertextual connections can be mapped life and art. TV Tropes also makes a distinction based on how the trope was born. If it is a trope that happened or happens in real life and that is what inspired it, the trope falls into Truth In Television (such as Abusive Parents, which can be an interpretation for Polonius in Hamlet); if it is the reverse and something that had only happened in fiction actually becomes reality, it is Life Imitates Art (which is, however, not considered a trope any more but trivia). The trope Reality Is Unrealistic also shows how much tropers are aware of fiction's influence on our perception of reality. It describes the phenomenon when the fictional account of something is so ingrained in people's minds that they will start thinking
that it is true, and will believe that all other accounts, including reality, to be false and unrealistic.

### 3.3.2 Foregrounding intertextuality

The intertextuality in literature and popular culture is the central concept of TV Tropes. Postmodernism aims to “[locate] the discourses of both history and fiction within an ever-expanding intertextual network that mocks any notion of either single origin or simple causality” (Hutcheon 129), and TV Tropes puts this into practice not only by writing about it but with a demonstration. Hyperlinks act as the portals between different works, which are connected by the usage of the same trope.

To add a new level of intertextuality, a great number of tropes have names that refers to either their Trope Namer or another characteristic example for the trope. 

*Hamlet*, for example, has been Trope Namer for many widely used tropes, such as *Alas, Poor Yorick* (“a character picks up the severed head of a loved one and cradles it close to them”) and *The Ophelia* (“an insane but beautiful young woman”). This also serves to invoke another work in the reader’s mind while looking at the tropes of something completely different, again leading to unexpected connections.

Tropers do not simply list the tropes that can be found in a work, it is also necessary to include the relationship between the trope and the given work. For the sake of clarification and consistency, an elaborate reference guide has been devised on how writers can “play with” a trope. There are 25 different uses listed currently, ranging from straight use to parody, inversion, deconstruction, lampshading, being discussed and more. For example, in *Hamlet*, the trope *Hot Blooded* is used differently: it is used straight (Laertes on Ophelia’s death) and subverted as well (Hamlet claims to admire such qualities, and the audience is led to believe he will become the same, but it never really happens). The character of Fortinbras can be considered a straight and subverted use at the same time, as he seems to go to war “over a valueless piece of land”, while his real intentions might have been completely different.

In postmodernism (overlapping with archetypal literary criticism), the earlier notions of what makes a work good, or even great, are highly challenged.

This formal linking throughout the common denominators of intertextuality and narrativity is usually offered these days, not as a reduction or as a shrinking of the scope and value of fiction, but rather as an expansion (Hutcheon 129).

What has usually been seen as copying and an act of unoriginality, and was generally looked down on, is now re-evaluated. Postmodernism embraces the idea of “writing working through writing” (Edward Said, qtd. in Hutcheon 129), claiming that originality as such is undesired, because the lack of familiarity, Eco’s “vague feeling of deja vu” would result in the work not having any meaning for the audience (Hutcheon 126). As TV Tropes notes several times, tropes are “present in the audience members' minds and expectations”, thus *Tropes Are Tools* to evoke emotions and add more depth. Writers are encouraged to do just that: take and use already existing images and create something new by them (Douglas Crimp, qtd. in Hutcheon 11).
3.3.3 Foregrounding irony and 'narcissism'

Following in the footsteps of modernism, a characteristic of the postmodern is revisiting the past, but “with irony”, as Barry claims (91). Hutcheon elaborates on this notion and adds that this revisiting is less for the sake of nostalgia, but more of a critical reassessment of the past in the light of the present (19). This “present of the past” (4) is presented on TV Tropes by inserting past literature into the context of present day entertainment media and culture, and discussing them with the language, tools and attitudes of the present. In Hamlet, Polonius is described as Captain Obvious (someone who is stating the obvious), the name of which trope comes from a typical spoken slang phrase that has been in use since the late 1990s (KnowYourMeme.com).

The reverse is also indicated on TV Tropes, and tropers also try to show how older tropes still get used over and over in literature and entertainment media. One collection of such tropes is the Lit. Class Tropes page, which lists more traditional literary techniques that are academically accepted ones, those “that you will learn about in your English class”; for example one of Hamlet’s characteristic style trope, alliteration (Added Alliterative Appeal), or Omnipresent Tropes, such as Plot. To illustrate how long a trope can live and that many old tropes can still effortlessly fit into new narratives, tropers have created categories for the “ages” of tropes (The Oldest Ones In The Book), ranging from Older Than Dirt — “predating the Greek alphabet (circa 800 BCE)” —, through Older Than Steam — “first seen between the invention of printing press (1439) and the steam engine (1698)”, for example every trope Shakespeare has codified – to Older Than Television - “first seen between the invention of the radio (1890s) and the television (1940s).”

The use of irony is evident throughout the site, and that is what makes the title “serious art” for works traditionally part of the canon disappear by subjecting such works to similar treatment as those generally considered to be “non-serious” (Hutcheon 44). The rather humorous approach is also apparent in the informal language and style, often rich in slang, puns and various jokes. In Self-Demonstrating Articles, instead of the usual description, many works and characters are also parodied but all in good humour; one outstanding example being the article for Finnegans Wake by James Joyce, which imitates the language and style of the novel perfectly.

By “narcissism in narrative technique”, Barry means meta elements, “where novels focus on and debate their own ends and processes” (91). The greatest extension to the original notion of literary archetype on TV Tropes is the “tropification” of the circumstances of creation, such as authorial intention (for example Money, Dear Boy, which denotes works that were written purely for financial reasons – several of Shakespeare’s works are considered to be a prime examples); mistakes, inconsistencies and artistic licences (Did Not Do Research tropes – Hamlet has already been mentioned as an example); and the characteristics of writing (Stylistic Suck is the trope for intentional poor quality in writing, Hamlet’s heroic couplets in The Murder of Gonzago can be considered a manifestation).

Furthermore, TV Tropes subjects itself to the same “narcissism” as well. Tropers analyse the website as they do all texts, and they list characteristic tropes, such as Post Modern, Lampshade Hanging and Breaking The Fourth Wall. The latter trope is in itself a narcissistic technique, which is particularly prevalent in how tropers usually introduce themselves; by using “This Troper”, they accentuate how the site is created: by multiple anonymous contributors. In descriptions or other longer blocks of text, tropers also have a tendency to point out if they have used a trope in their writing – this is denoted by putting a hyperlink to the trope in question on that particular word or sentence.
3.3.4 Challenging the distinction between high and low culture

Another upshot of postmodernism is how it brings high and low culture together, even as much as “bridging of the gap between elite and popular art” (Hutcheon 44). TV Tropes first began analysing only television series, but throughout the years its scope has expanded and other branches of entertainment media started cropping up in the examples. As many tropes originate from literature, works from all literary traditions started to unavoidably be included. Today, it contains virtually everything that has a narrative, from classical literature to anime and webcomics, which means one can easily compare and find similarities between *Hamlet* and the video game *Portal* (they share the trope *Bread, Eggs, Breaded Eggs*).

Hutcheon argues that “the centre no longer holds”, meaning that everything that had previously been pushed to the periphery is now important (12). As it has been mentioned before, TV Tropes considers all work notable, regardless of length, recognition or quality. The concept of canon is completely eliminated on the site, the conventional hierarchy is broken down, making all works equal.

Linda Hutcheon summarises postmodernity as being “historically aware, hybrid, and inclusive”, and on TV Tropes, all of these features can be observed. For a postmodern philosophy, however, a similarly postmodern medium was needed for success: this was New Media, and Web 2.0 in particular, the implications of which will be discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter Four

The New Media Aspect

“Arguably literature, more than any other language, with its allusions, influences, and conventions, is ideally read as if it were hypertext anyway.” (Stephen Pulsford)

4.1 What is New Media?

Although the “newness” of media platforms belonging to New Media is highly debated, it is the most recognised term for the section of the media that is driven by digital technology and the Internet. (Creeber & Martin 1). Starting in the 1980s, the paradigm shift often called the 'Digital Revolution' has led to the creation of “an enormous, in some ways unique, academic resource” (Browner, Pulsford, and Sears 1) that is bound to shape the literary studies of the future.

4.2 TV Tropes as a Web 2.0 project

On the work page The Internet, the first thing tropers note is that the Internet is “the entire reason TV Tropes can exist.” Indeed, without the technology to support it, the idea behind TV Tropes would have remained exactly that. The site expanded the definition of a trope compared to earlier similar concepts in literature and extended the scope of works included in the analysis; thus a complete collection of such a large area would have been near-impossible to compile without the virtually unlimited storage capacities of the Internet. Similarly, without hypertext, the many connections between different works and tropes, the entire intertextual network could not have been this effectively visualised. The Internet also provided a suitable place to start and publish such a project as content could be easily shared with anyone around the world who was interested. The Internet has always been a possible outlet and platform for good ideas that can not be realised in the forms of established print technologies, and would otherwise not receive any recognition whatsoever (Browner, Pulsford, and Sears 179). The spread of Web 2.0 tools, such as the wiki software TV Tropes is built on, have further magnified this effect.

The Internet and especially Web 2.0 have had one more important advantage in the realisation of TV Tropes: it ensured that anybody who wished to do so would be able to participate and create content on the site. This is a crucial element in the process of identifying tropes, one that was mentioned by Eco as well in his essay discussed earlier.

Every time I have scanned Casablanca with very cooperative research groups, the review has taken many hours. Furthermore, when a team starts this kind of game, the instances of stopping the videotape increase proportionally with the size of the audience. Each member of the team sees something that the others have missed... (Eco 449-50)

With a wiki implemented, a constantly expanding community can be formed and tropers from all parts of the world may add new observations, until the complete picture is reached. French philosopher Pierre Lévy have called this phenomenon 'collective intelligence', and he claims that “no one knows everything, everyone knows something, all knowledge resides in humanity” (Lévy, qtd. in Jenkins 26-28). Not all contributors find all
tropes, not all know about every work there is, the only things everyone is aware of are the minimum that is needed for the community to work (for example how to edit a wiki page) and only a fracture of the whole trope catalog. As Zachary Pincus-Roth wrote after interviewing tropers, it is also fairly common among people that they choose a number of particular tropes, “adopt” them and then tend to them afterwards regularly, which includes checking that others have identified the trope in question correctly. This implies that they know their tropes very well so they would be able to spot unfit examples among other tropers additions.

4.3 New possibilities for literature in New Media

As an inherently New Media project, TV Tropes also illustrates some of the possibilities that lie for literary studies in the Internet. The following sections aim to point out what is new for literature about New Media, and what advantages it might have in store for it.

4.3.1 Electronic 'public spheres'

Many academics consider the Internet to be the digital age manifestation of Jürgen Habermas’s 'public sphere' (Browner, Pulsford, Sears 6), which is the concept of the existence of safe environments for “free discussion, rational-critical debate on politics and literature” (Tímár). The World Wide Web takes the concept to brand new heights. It is an electronic 'public sphere' that welcomes an even greater variety of voices, forming a new “cyberspace democracy” that is not exclusive (Bassett, qtd. in Browner, Pulsford, and Sears 6) and where usual hierarchies are broken (Browner, Pulsford, and Sears 31). This change played a part in the emergence of the already mentioned 'collective intelligence' communities, and Henry Jenkins argues that online fan communities (such as TV Tropes) are the ones who bring this philosophy to life the fullest (Interactive Audiences). They are a continuation to the 'public sphere’ as they value “collective discussion, negotiation, and development” (Lévy, qtd. in Jenkins 27), but they also show how the traditional notions of knowledge and expertise are being challenged.

Already in the 18th century, coffee houses provided an independent environment for discussion, free from authority (Tímár). The “expertise” of every participant was equally valid in these public spheres, and their opinions were listened to; the Internet offers the same, but to a much greater extent. Now anyone can have their opinions “recorded”, as the Web allows and encourages the publishing of ideas in “print”, which has been traditionally a privilege of experts and academics (Browner, Pulsford, and Sears 31). This does not mean all of the Internet is perfect and accurate, but it has potential that must not be overlooked (Browner, Pulsford, and Sears 1). TV Tropes, just like most literary websites, was created by a group of enthusiasts, and most tropers today are still “only” fans of television, literature and fiction in general. As David Gauntlett noted in his case study on Wikipedia, a similarly wiki-based project, “a kind of frenzy of friendly but competitive fascination tends to generate precise and carefully composed articles on every subject”(41).

As it has been pointed out in this thesis before, TV Tropes is an outstanding example with its solid literary foundation and extensive analyses. Its style is not academic, neither does it consider itself to be serious (Serious Business), but while still presenting a logical and (as has been pointed out) academically acceptable framework, it has the potential of making literature and literary criticism enjoyable, yet another positive influence the Internet might carry (Browner, Pulsford, and Sears 32). As tropers note on the home page of TV Tropes,
their intention with the site is to celebrate fiction and as a form of social activity and entertainment, find the answer to why they love what they love. Such websites can be key components in attracting more people to ‘public spheres’ and making them think and voice their thoughts, as well as possibly raise their interest in literature and maybe even increase the enjoyment of literature (Browner, Pulsford, and Sears 32).

4.3.2 “Citizens of knowledge society”

The development of computer sciences in the 20th century has inevitably led to the re-evaluation of the aim and use of knowledge. New technologies offer new possibilities for the creation, storage and management of text and different data, and a new type of organisation of human knowledge has begun. New disciplines were to be created, such as Digital Humanities (or Humanities Computing) to discuss issues like the use of computers and digital technology in studying and teaching literature and the arts, as well as their impact on scholarship and knowledge (Browner, Pulsford, and Sears 166-7).

All wikis on the Internet, as content management systems and digital age encyclopaedias, are examples of this organisation of information and knowledge. TV Tropes offers insight into how non-academics are deconstructing and categorising the world of fiction (which has grown immensely by the appearance of the different media in the 20th century) (and by extension the real world) the way that is most logical given the circumstances: online and with the help of hypertext. Called the “post-Norton literary field” by Robert Scholes, only the capacities of the Internet can handle postmodernism’s diversity, and create order in the sometimes chaotic inflow of new knowledge (Scholes, qtd. in Browner, Pulsford, and Sears 171). Intentionally or without even realising it, every passive user of the Internet, in the past decades, has become an active collaborator, carrying out “collective knowledge management.” What used to be the job of a group of library science experts, is now a natural activity for every level of readership.

Everybody is becoming a specialist in library science, because when you categorise some information, you do it for yourself to organise your memory, but at the same time, you organise the memory for others. Every time that you create a link, every time that you put a tag, you are organising the common memory. You exercise the role of the keeper of a library. This is a very new thing. (Pierre Lévy on Collective Intelligence Literacy)

A significant part of this building of digital libraries is based on traditional notions of literary studies, and the material on the Internet mirrors that in the library (Browner, Pulsford, and Sears 169-70). It is TV Tropes and similar online projects that show that at the same time, new voices appear with new concepts and often unusual ideas; these are increasingly put into practice, many even breaching the confines of high culture and inserting “great” literature into contexts unimaginable before in academia (Browner, Pulsford, and Sears 31) – a very postmodern tendency. This will unavoidably lead to a revision of the literary canon (Browner, Pulsford, and Sears 185), and the realignment of literature in a wider cultural context (Browner, Pulsford, and Sears 31), just like it has already been recontextualised on TV Tropes.

There are a number of studies that aim to assess the value of the new hypertextual libraries in learning, an also important feat in knowledge society. Some results suggest that hypertext forces people to read more actively and more attentively, which “produces
longterm retention and the ability to use” (Browner, Pulsford, and Sears 181). TV Tropes offers proof in this matter as well, and the phenomenon has been named by tropers TV Tropes Will Ruin Your Life. This is a change in many tropers' and readers' habits of perceiving fiction, characterised by an improved ability of critical thinking. It has been noted by many and it is generally acknowledged that the longer one is immersed in the world of TV Tropes, the more likely they will be able to notice and identify tropes; which is jokingly said to, in a way, ruin their entertainment experience.

This also signals that the Internet has the potential of changing reading habits and standards, maybe even writing and composition (Browner et al. 31-32).
Chapter Five

Conclusion

“Newsreaders still feel it is worth a special and rather worrying mention if, for instance, a crime was planned by people 'over the Internet'. They don't bother to mention when criminals use the telephone or the M4, or discuss their dastardly plans over a cup of tea.”

(Douglas Adams)

As Marshall McLuhan said already in 1967, media changes everything. “The medium is the message,” and it comes with a wide range of consequences in all walks of life, from politics and society to the arts. Grasping such fundamental changes is impossible without the knowledge of the inner workings of the media (McLuhan, qtd. in Martin 157). Half a century ago, it was the television that made everything different, now, it is the Internet. Many people welcomed it, many are wary of New Media, claiming that although it has advantages, it is mostly a “a frustrating, overloaded virtual universe of advertising, hype, doubtful amusement, and trivia” (Browner, Pulsford, and Sears 1). The solution is to study it, and websites like TV Tropes can further our understanding of how literature and culture is perceived now.

The key to the phenomenon is our relationship to it (Creeber & Royston 4), it is our perception of it that shapes it. In the hands of the innovative, the Internet becomes a tool, and it will be what we make of it. Therefore, after figuring out how this whole new world works, attention must be directed on answering the question of what we can do with it. The potential is there, and an exciting array of new possibilities can help shape present and future. With insight and imagination, these should be valuabley explored, in academia as well. The Internet is bound to change intellectual life as it has been pointed out before (Browner, Pulsford, and Sears 186), one website at a time, and TV Tropes is a definite indicator of what direction it might take.

Pierre Lévy said the result of the process is still uncertain, and we are living in transitional times. (Lévy, qtd. in Jenkins, Interactive Audiences). It is still hard to see where exactly the new place for literature in digital culture is, but the change will definitely not result in the disappearance of “old media” and past traditions. New Media does not eradicate but “modify and complement” (Roger Fiddler, qtd. in Moyo 150). Maybe not perfect, but nevertheless Television Tropes and Idioms and other similar websites will definitely be a worthwhile addition to literature as we know it.
Works cited


Television Tropes and Idioms. n.p., 2004. Web. 21 Apr. 2012 (See complete list of tropes cited in the appendix.)


# Appendix I.

A complete, alphabetically ordered list of the tropes cited in this paper.

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Appendix II.


Abusive Parents: Certain interpretations of Polonius show him as this towards Ophelia, manipulating her and keeping her emotionally stunted.

Added Alliterative Appeal: "Marry, this is miching mallecho; it means mischief."

Adult Child: Hamlet is apparently 30 if the gravedigger scene is any indication. He doesn't act like it. Many, though not necessarily all, scholars think that he's actually in his late teens or maybe early twenties.

Alas, Poor Yorick: The Trope Namer. Hamlet finds the skull of Yorick, the court jester, in the graveyard, prompting him to reflect on him mortality.

Anachronism Stew: Hamlet attends a university that was not founded until 300 years after the play was set and is a member of a religion that hadn't yet reached Denmark.

Anti-Hero: Hamlet, ranging from III and IV. He acts rudely to many who (may) mean him no harm, kills Polonius for spying on him (though he seemed to think it was Claudius hiding and watching) and has Guildenstern and Rosencrantz sent to death (it is arguable what are their personal intentions over them spying for Claudius, making Hamlet's actions to them be justifiable to varying degrees). (Link to Alternate Character Interpretation.)

Author Filibuster: Hamlet's famous lecture on properly acting a scene he'd written.


Beam Me Up, Scotty!: Many, including "Hoist by His Own Petard", "Methinks the lady doth protest too much," and "Alas, poor Yorick, I knew him well."

Black and Gray Morality: Few if any of the primary characters are indisputably virtuous.

Black Humor: "He will stay till ye come." (Hamlet about Polonius' body)

Bluffing The Murderer: Hamlet's reason for staging The Murder of Gonzago. (Link to Show Within A Show)

Bread, Eggs, Breaded Eggs: The earliest example:
  Polonius: The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historicalpastoral...

Break the Cutie: Ophelia. See also Butt Monkey, Kill The Cutie, and The Woobie.

Brooding Boy, Gentle Girl: Hamlet and Ophelia could be seen as a deconstruction.
But Not Too Evil: Lots of people seem to ignore who says "brevity is the soul of wit" and treat it as Shakespeare's own views.

Camp Gay: Osric in some performances.

Captain Obvious: Polonius is the master of this trope. Appropriately enough, his last words are, "O! I am slain!" It has been assumed he says that due to the difficulty the audience would have had confirming the death of a character behind a curtain, but still:

- Several minor characters in the play find themselves playing this trope as Hamlet verbally spars with them; they revert to saying inanities because they're so vastly outmatched in wit — witty though they might be compared with almost anyone in almost any other play.

Catch the Conscience: Trope Namer. Hamlet hires an acting troupe to perform a play about a king being murdered, with a few additions to make it more like Claudius's murder of King Hamlet, to get a reaction out of Claudius.

Character Filibuster: Through the character of Hamlet talking to a performer, Shakespeare tells people about his pet pees in acting.

Comforting the Widow: Claudius "comforts" Gertrude. It helps win him the throne. On the other hand, he does seem to genuinely love her. It is not an unpopular Alternate Character Interpretation that the throne was an afterthought and Claudius killed the king solely for Gertrude.

Country Matters: Trope Namer.

Curtain Camouflage: Poor Polonius should have picked a better place to hide.

Dare to Be Badass: Hamlet tries to talk himself into it; "To Be Or Not To Be" is an attempt that fails. It takes him maybe three acts, but he finally gets the point with "My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!"

Darker and Edgier: Considered one of Shakespeare's darkest plays.

Dead Baby Comedy: Hamlet's roundabout explanation for what happened to Polonius's body.

Dead Guy Puppet: It's not quite explicit in the text, but the graveyard scene can be very naturally played this way.

Dead Person Conversation: With the ghost of King Hamlet.

Deconstruction: Of the "revenge drama" in vogue at the time.

Defeat Means Friendship: At least between Laertes and Hamlet. Unusual in that no one has really defeated the other, as the fight results in both their deaths.

Deus ex Machina: In Act IV, Hamlet is conveniently kidnapped by pirates on his way to England, who kindly return him to Denmark just in time for the play's climax.
Does Not Like Shoes: In many adaptations — theatrical productions, films, paintings, etc. — Ophelia is barefoot during the mad scene.

- The recent RSC film has Hamlet barefoot in most of the indoor scenes.

Double Entendre: Ubiquitous throughout the entire play. (Here, the troper links to an online article on Cracked.com, which points out many examples for this trope.)

  Do you think I mean country matters?

- The 2008 RSC production made this into a Single Entendre by leaving a pause between the first and second syllables of 'country'.

Double Standard: Polonius forbids his daughter to so much as spend time with Hamlet, but doesn’t see much harm in spreading rumors that his son visits brothels. Ophelia doesn't buy into this, and tells her brother he’d be a hypocrite if he admonished her to be chaste and then went off and had sex himself.

Driven to Suicide: Ophelia drowns herself in a river. Or she was really just so insane she didn't even think to save herself from drowning after falling into the water while hanging garlands from a tree. It's not an unpopular theory that Gertrude murdered Ophelia after learning she knows too much (that or she was Mercy Killing her). The 2010/2011 London production at the National Theatre heavily implied this was the case.

Due to the Dead

Emo Teen: Hamlet, the original emo kid, is a brooding pessimist who dresses all in black and pontificates about suicide. He’s also spoilt, and resents his mother for remarrying. The slight hitch occurs in the Gravedigger scene, where it's stated that Hamlet is actually somewhere in his 30s. This means either (A) Hamlet is too old to be acting like this, adding to the theory that he's crazy, or (B) Hamlet isn't 30 and Shakespeare made another mathematical error. Shakespeare scholars have suggested that the Gravedigger's line was thrown in at the insistence of Richard Burbage, the actor who originally played the lead role and was probably unwilling to play a teenager. Or maybe Shakespeare could do maths just fine, but the gravedigger can't.

Everybody's Dead, Dave: The only major named characters who survive are Horatio and Fortinbras (who is often left out). A messenger even arrives at the very end to assure you that, yes, even Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead.

Evil Uncle: Claudius.

Famous Last Words:

  Hamlet: The rest is silence.

Fatal Flaw: It's widely agreed that Hamlet has one (he discussed the concept in an early scene). There's rather less agreement on what, specifically, it is.

Fleeting Demographic: Determining, of all things, the setting: Shakespeare probably chose the Hamlet story as an appeal to James I's theaterloving queen — Anne of Denmark.
Foil: Hamlet has several. Most notable are Fortinbras, Horatio and Laertes. Before they fight, Hamlet (mockingly and very ironically) refers to himself as a foil to Laertes, thus making this play a possible Trope Namer. Also the swords which they are using are called foils making that line a Pun.

- Also, the player who weeps Tender Tears over Hecuba overtly inspires Hamlet to reflect on the contrast between them.

Gender Flip: While not exactly common, there is a recurring trend of recasting characters as the opposite sex in modern productions:

- Sarah Bernhardt, the most famous actress of her time, played Hamlet in an 1899 production (and was the first to portray him on film in Le Duel de Hamlet.)
- Alexander Fodor's 2007 arthouse film adaptation featured a female Horatio and "Polonia."
- The 2008 Royal Shakespeare Company production converts minor character Cornelius to Cornelia.

Get Thee to a Nunnery: The Trope Namer. The play contains several double entendres that go over the heads of modern audiences; among the best known are the "nunnery" and the "fishmonger" (slang for a brothel and a pimp, respectively), from the scene where Polonius tries to manipulate Hamlet through Ophelia.

Gondor Calls for Aid: Fortinbras's entrance is somewhere between this and Deus ex Machina.

Good Night Sweet Prince: The Trope Namer. The phrase originates in Horatio's farewell to the dying Hamlet in the final act.

Held Gaze: The "long distance love-scene" from Laurence Olivier's film version of Hamlet, where Hamlet and Ophelia hold each others' gaze from opposite ends of a corridor.

Hoist by His Own Petard: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern deliver their own death warrant, not realising that Hamlet altered the document before his escape by replacing his name with theirs. The Trope Namer; Hamlet remarks:

'tis the sport to have the engineer
Hoist with his own petard
- Claudius and Laertes are killed by their own poison.
  Laertes: Why, as a woodcock to mine own springe, Osric,
  I am justly killed with mine own treachery.

Hot Blooded: Played straight with Laertes on Ophelia's death, and with Fortinbras who goes to war over a valueless piece of land. Hamlet himself subverts this, claiming to admire these characters but never taking the initiative himself and passing up chances to kill his target. In something of a contradiction he castigates himself for own his lack of passion ("I am pidgeon livered and lack gall") while praising Horatio for it ("Give me the man who is not passion's slave and I will wear him in my heart's core").

- Also subverted with Fortinbras: the "war over a valueless piece of land" was actually an excuse. His real aim was to conquer Denmark on the way home. Link to Magnificent Bastard.

Hurricane Of Aphorisms: Polonius.
Hurricane of Puns: The whole play.

Hypocritical Humor: Polonius. For example, he gives the well-known line "brevity is the soul of wit" — at the end of a very long-winded speech — but he is one of the least brief and least witty talkers around. He proceeds to give plenty of other advice that he also doesn't follow. Later, he complains that the Player King's speech is too long.

Ignored Epiphany: Claudius comes to realize what evil he's done, but keeps right on being evil.

My words fly up: my thoughts remain below.
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

Incest Is Relative: Hamlet is very squicked at the idea of his mother and his uncle doing the nasty.

Innocent Innuendo: Ophelia and Laertes, brother and sister, admonish each other to remain chaste. They probably don't mean to get as graphic as they do. Ophelia's going to keep her lock to herself, not open up her chaste treasure to Hamlet's unmastered importunity, while Laertes will keep his key to himself and reck his own rede (wreck his own reed).

Irony: In a Long List to Ophelia about all the things he hates about women, Hamlet says he dislikes women pretending not to know things in front of men. Ophelia often has to resort to pretending to know nothing to try and pacify Hamlet or in an attempt to avoid further humiliation such as in Act 3, Scene 2 where he makes crude jokes in front of the whole court. Ashamed, Ophelia says, 'I think nothing' which instead fuels more lewd comments. The irony appears lost on Hamlet.

Karma Houdini:
• Arguably, young Fortinbras - some readings of the text and some adaptations have him attempting to conquer Denmark underhandedly rather than just passing through with his army as he claims, and the ending for him is Hamlet supporting him to be the next king. If this was his plan, then he's not only not made to pay for his treacherous actions, he ends up being rewarded for it.
• Hamlet, sort of. He kills Polonius, and although Claudius tries to have him killed on the quiet Hamlet evades punishment. He also seems to receive no punishment for the deaths of Rosencrantz, Guildenstern OR Ophelia, until the very end, and it's implied that Laertes's forgiveness absolves him completely.
• Discussed when Hamlet considers murdering Claudius while Claudius is praying, whichHamlet worries would send him (Claudius) to Heaven. Subverted when, after Hamlet departs, Claudius reveals that he was not actually praying ("Words without thoughts never to Heaven go"), so Hamlet's hesitation was moot.

Karmic Death: Ophelia and King Hamlet didn't suffer this. Everyone else who died — i.e., almost the entire cast (link to Kill 'Em All) — did, in one way or another.

Kick the Dog: In the 1990 and 1996 film adaptations, Laertes explicitly breaks the rules of the dueling conduct to wound and poison Hamlet. In the lines of the play, Claudius lets Gertrude drink from a cup of wine he knowingly poisoned for Hamlet to drink, only telling
her to not drink from it (which she does anyway) as opposed to rushing over to ensure she
doesn't — despite earlier claiming that he really does love her. This differs by production.
Derek Jacobi in Branagh's film version is visibly shaken at not being able to stop her from
drinking.

Kill 'Em All: The play has become famous for this, even though it was a standard trope in
tragedy at the time. Actually, Horatio and Fortinbras are both still alive at play's end.

Kill Him Already: A major part of the premise.

Kill The Cutie: Ophelia.

Like a Weasel: The Trope Namer. Polonius is like this all the time. Osric, too.

Local Reference: The gravedigger says that Hamlet has been sent to England to cure his
madness, and if it doesn't work nobody will notice since everyone there is mad anyway.

Love Hurts: It also kills.

Mad Oracle: Possibly Ophelia, in her mad scene.

Make Up Is Evil: One charge he brings against Ophelia
   I have heard of your paintings too, well enough; God has given you one
   face, and you make yourselves another.

Malicious Slander: "Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape
calumny."

Most Writers Are Writers: Hamlet and Polonius are obsessed with words and the craft of
writing.

Nietzsche Wannabe: "What a piece of work is man ... and yet, to me, what is this
quintessence of dust? Man delights not me."

Obfuscating Insanity: Hamlet fakes insanity. Or hell, maybe he is actually insane. Or
possibly he's faking insanity and is actually insane.

Old Windbag: Polonius

The Ophelia: Another Trope Namer. Ophelia becomes this after going mad in Act IV.

Pet the Dog: Claudius prays and confesses his sins, unaware that Hamlet is watching him.
He also states that it will not be enough to absolve him as he still benefits from his sins.
Though some adaptations seem to imply that Claudius knows that Hamlet is listening and
prays because he knows that Hamlet will not kill him while he is confessed because that
means he will go to heaven. Link to Batman Gambit.

Please Shoot the Messenger: Claudius famously sends Hamlet off to England with a message
(and with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to watch him). The message directs the English to
kill the person holding it. Hamlet manages to escape, and gives them the message to deliver instead.

Railing Kill: Branagh's version. Falling Chandelier of Doom follows shortly thereafter.

Rasputinian Death: Claudius. Although it's likely Hamlet's determination to make sure he's Killed Off for Real.

Revenge: Hamlet was written in the tradition of the revenge tragedies that were popular in the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras.

Rocks Fall, Everyone Dies: The final scene sees most of the cast dead with almost farcical suddenness.

Show Within a Show: The Murder of Gonzago. (Trope Namer for Catch the Conscience.)

Sibling Triangle: Claudius murders his brother and marries his brother's wife. Interpretations vary as to how complicit Gertrude is in the plot.

Sketchy Successor: The late King Hamlet is considered a ruler among rulers. King Claudius assassinated him to get the job and spends his reign doing nothing but trying to keep people from becoming suspicious. Also inverted at the end of Hamlet, after everyone has died. The Danish crown is passed down to King Fortinbras, monarch of Norway. Throughout the story, it is mentioned that Denmark and Norway are having conflicts, but by the end, the entire Danish royal family is dead and Fortinbras is implied to be an improvement over Claudius.

Sleazy Politician: Polonius in certain interpretations, also Claudius, who quickly turns the rebellious Laertes to his side.

Speech Impediment: In certain interpretations, Ophelia does have a lisp, and some of her lines actually reflect this (for example, "twice two months" is understood as "two-es...two months"). This gives Hamlet's line ("...you lisp, you nickname God's creatures...") a second, literal meaning.

Spin-Off: Many, many, many. The most famous is Tom Stoppard's play Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead. A more recent example is John Updike's novel Gertrude and Claudius.

Stealth Insult: Hamlet's weapon of choice.

Subverted Rhyme Every Occasion:

Hamlet: For thou dost know, O Damon dear,
This realm dismantled was
Of Jove himself; and now reigns here
A very, very — pajock.
Horatio: You might have rhymed.

Surrogate Soliloquy: The Alas, Poor Yorick bit.
Suspiciously Similar Substitute: Osric can very easily be argued to be this to Polonius.

Sword Fight: Hamlet vs. Laertes.

Take That, Audience!: The First Gravedigger casually insults England, saying that everyone there is mad.

Talkative Loon: Hamlet (feigned), Ophelia (real).

Tender Tears: A player, over Hecuba.

That Cloud Looks Like: In a surreal touch, this scene is often set indoors, far from any windows.

Those Two Guys: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Together in Death:
- Attempted by Horatio, when he tries to poison himself to follow Hamlet (link to You Are Worth Hell). Averted by Hamlet, who ordered Horatio to live.
- Possibly Gertrude and Claudius.

Tragedy: One of William Shakespeare’s four major tragedies.

A Tragedy of Impulsiveness: After blowing his first chance to kill Claudius, Hamlet strikes out blindly at a shape in the curtains he thinks is Claudius. This turns out to be Polonius, who is the father of the woman Hamlet loves, which sends everything straight to hell for him.

Tragic Hero

Tragic Mistake: Hamlet’s downfall can be traced back to the moment where he sees Claudius at prayer and decides to wait until later to avenge his father.

Upper Class Twit: Polonius. Osric.

What Happened to the Mouse?: Reynaldo is an agent of Polonius’s sent to both spy on and ruin the reputation of Laertes when the latter leaves for France. Whatever actual impact Reynaldo has on anything is never touched on, and he hasn’t returned to Denmark by the end of the play.

What the Hell, Hero?: After Hamlet kills Polonius.

   Gertrude: O, what a rash and bloody deed is this!

Who Is This Guy Again?: Claudius is only named in the stage directions; the other characters all refer to him via sobriquets such as "the King" or "my uncle".

World of Ham(let)

Writers Cannot Do Math:
• Hamlet is at least 27 if his memory of Yorick is to be believed, but he was studying at Wittenberg University when his father died (see Anachronism Stew above). In Shakespeare's time, most university students were teenagers. People seem to forget this when insisting that Hamlet must be thirty years old. There is a theory that Shakespeare originally wrote for Hamlet to been in his teens but somewhere towards the end decided to age him up so a specific actor could play the part.
• Dawn comes, by Horatio's count, one hundred seconds after midnight.

You Killed My Father: The main plot. Also, the reason Laertes kills Hamlet and possibly why Fortinbras wants to invade Denmark.

The Play Within A Play contains examples of the following tropes:

Does This Remind You of Anything?: And how!

Karma Houdini: Lucianus, unless his comeuppance was left out of the dumb-show and occurred after the play is stopped.

Stylistic Suck: A spoilerific dumb show followed by a series of tedious heroic couplets. This may be Hamlet's fault, since he rewrote bits of it, and was more concerned with trying to Catch the Conscience of Claudius than with coming up with a truly decent play.

Trailers Always Spoil: Before the play properly starts, three clowns come out and act out almost the entire plot. Many modern productions omit this part, since you're not supposed to spoil The Mousetrap.