**[Images of physical suffering and pain in ‘Hamlet’](http://meighan.edublogs.org/2012/04/26/images-of-physical-suffering-and-pain-in-hamlet/" \o "Permanent Link to Images of physical suffering and pain in ‘Hamlet’)**

Images of sickness and disease abound.

The ghastly visible effects which the poison had on Old Hamlet:  
‘And a most instant tetter bark’d about,  
Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust,  
All my smooth body.’ (1.5.71-73)

References to sickness and disease apply sometimes to individuals and sometimes to humankind in general, and somtimes to the state of Denmark or the whole world. But whomever they refer to, they profoundly influence the general vision and viewpoint of the play.

Gertrude speaks of her ‘sick soul’ (4.5.17); Laertes refers to ‘sickness in my heart’ and how ‘The canker galls the infants of the spring / Too oft before their buttons be disclosed’. Hamlet tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that his ‘wit’s diseased’ and uses an image of disease to berate and warn his mother in her relations with the current King. He implores her not to console herself with the belief that the apparition of her dead husband is due to her son’s madness. That self-deception will have a fatal moral effect:  
‘Lay not that flattering unction to your soul . . .  
It will but skin and film the ulcerous place,  
Whiles rank corruption, mining all within,  
Infects unseen.’ (3.4.145-149)

The King justifies his decision to send his step-son to England by means of a medical metaphor:  
‘Diseases desperate grown  
By desperate appliance are relieved  
Or not at all.’ (4.3.9-11)

For Claudius, the cure is to send Hamlet to England: ‘For like the hectic in my blood he rages / And thou must cure me . . .’ (4.3.64-65)

Claudius then sums up the danger presented to himself by Hamlet’s unexpected return through yet another sickness image:  
‘But to the quick of the ulcer,  
Hamlet comes back.’ (4.7.123-124)

All these images of sickness, disease and rottenness make referece to and symbolise the corruption that is at the heart of the state, and the associated evil in humankind that has caused this corruption to occur.

Hamlet describes to Horatio the ease with which subversion can occur, and how human nature can be infected or corrupted by a very small blemish:  
‘. . . that these men,  
Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect . . .  
His virtues else, be they as pure as grace . . .  
Shall in the general censure take corruption  
From that particular fault.’ (1.4.30-36)

According to Hamlet, Claudius is ‘the canker of our nature’.