

English literature A - levels

Week two

Tragedy

Hamartia

Looking back at GCSEs in English literature, tragedy can be formed and portrayed in different ways. The first way it can be portrayed is by using the name of the greek tragedy, "Hamartia". "Hamartia" means a flaw that leads a hero to a downfall. Even though it is mostly used in greek, it is also found in Christian theology.

There has been many poems, books and plays that have "Hamartia" as a key feature of tragedy. For example, in Shakespeare's play "Macbeth" one of the most popular plays, Macbeth's hamartia is his vaulting ambition to be king.

Shakespeare portrays Macbeth as a strong, worthy character to be king so, in the text, Macbeth is told by the witches that he will be king but he doesn't get that role. For his desire to get the crown at any cost, Macbeth's actions cause him to have his own hamartia by killing his king (who he is most loyal to) killing innocent people and letting his wife mess with his mind and telling him that he is weak despite at that time women were supposed to honour their husbands and love them kindly.



Hubris

The meaning of “hubris” is that someone has excessive pride or self - confidence in their actions. Looking back to GCSEs, in the Shakespearian play “Romeo and Juliet” Shakespeare portrays Romeo to have a tremendous amount of hubris. I know this because Romeo wants to fall in love and go after a fair lady despite his parents and family hating the fair lady’s family.

Romeo is willing to go all the way for his one true love including breaking boundaries, rules, trust and murdering the character “Tibalt” who is Juliet’s cousin who she loves so much. This amount of hubris gets Romeo banned from Verona. As well as this, Shakespeare also contributes the characters to have fatal flaws which makes this play so interesting and exciting back in the jacobean times and now.

I think Shakespeare implied flaws for characters so the characters own personality and character traits can fight against them as they were traditionally written to be broken. Romeo’s fatal flaws are that he is too impetuousness (makes risky choices). Juliet’s fatal flaws are that she is too impulsive and will do anything to be with Romeo. The other character friar’s fatal flaws is that is he too blinded with peace and he badly wants to bring balance to Verona. Despite these characters having fatal flaws and hubris, they are defying the odds.



Hamlet research

The plot in this play is that the ghost king of Denmark tells his son, Hamlet, to get revenge on his father's murder by killing the new king which happens to be his uncle. Hamlet's rage grows stronger and escalates into madness when he tries to look at both sides of life and death but carries out the plan of revenge.

Hamlet's uncle is fearing for his life and crown so he makes up a plan that if he kills Hamlet first then his life and crown would be safe. In the end, there is a duel where the king, queen, Hamlet and his opponent are killed. I think the moral of the story is to not let the bad, evil and malicious side of things get to you and it makes you question morality.

In my opinion, I'm really intrigued by this play as it shows the bond between a father and son to be close as if it wasn't a close relationship, Hamlet wouldn't want revenge on his own uncle that got himself killed.

Characters

Ophelia: "I always walked the ragged edge"

"I shall obey my lord"

She is the epitome of a woman and she is a noblewoman of Denmark, the daughter of Polonius, sister of Laertes and the potential wife of prince Hamlet but, Hamlet's actions drive her crazy and result in her drowning.



Polonius: He is the chief counsellor of Claudius and the father of Ophelia and Laertes.

“Method in the madness”

“More matter than less art”



Claudius: “How may we try it further”

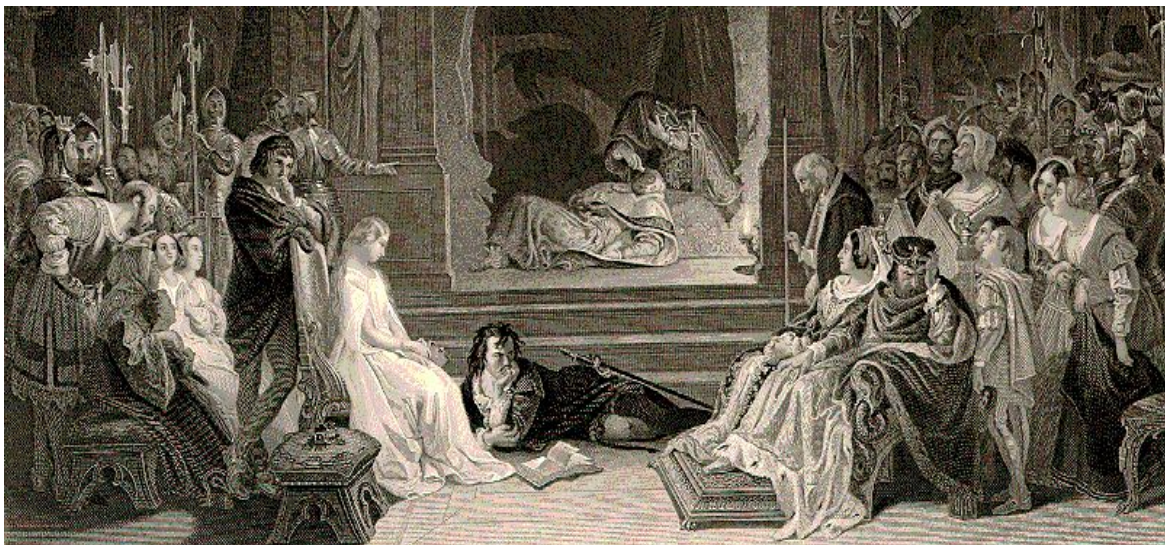
“We will try it”

King Claudius is the primary antagonist of the play. He is King Hamlet’s brother, second husband to Gertrude, the uncle and later stepfather to prince Hamlet.

Gertrude: “The lady doth protest too much, methinks.”

“I will speak daggers to her, but use none”

Is prince Hamlet’s mother so she is the queen of Denmark. Her relationship with Hamlet is very turbulent (meaning violently disturbed) since is resentment of her marrying Claudius - her husband’s brother after he killed the king.



Horatio: “If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,/absent thee from felicity a while,/ And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,/ to tell me a story.”

In the play, Horatio's origins are unknown but he was there on the battlefield when Hamlet's father defeated Fortinbras and went to university with Prince Hamlet. He has no court name apart from just "Hamlet's friend" because he is not directly involved in the intrigue Danish court.

Horatio first makes an appearance in Act 1 scene 1 when he, Bernardo and Marcellus encounter the ghost of the deceased King Hamlet. This scene reminds me of Macbeth when after the battle, Macbeth encounters the witches and they tell him that he will be successful and do great things as a king. Later in Act three, Horatio is revealed to be Hamlet's most trusted friends as Hamlet told Horatio the plan of getting revenge on his uncle. If he wasn't a trusted friend, Horatio would have told Hamlet's uncle and Prince Hamlet's uncle will imprison young Hamlet for attempting treason but he didn't.

Horatio only questioned Hamlet's decision once when he learns about the fate of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Despite this, Horatio supports every single decision Hamlet made but if he was a great friend then he could have seen what the mad decisions are doing to his mind and should have stopped him but instead, in the end, Horatio finishes a bottle of poison that was intended for Hamlet, yet again, if Horatio wasn't a true, trusted friend then he would have let Hamlet drink the poison but he ended his own life so Prince Hamlet didn't have to.

Past productions

The Shakespeare and company located in France have been doing multiple productions of Hamlet ever since 1948 and has had many actors play the role of "Hamlet" from Ian Bannen in 1961 to David Tennant in 2008. All these productions have been very successful as all the shows they have done were all sold out.

2008 past production:

Vivid storytelling:

"Hamlet was brought to life for many audience members new to Shakespeare." Director Gregory Doran said in an article.

Shattering set: In Robert Jone's set, hanging, heavy chandeliers, huge mirrors and glass floors were smashed dramatically behind the stage when Polonius where shot. This made the audience jump as they didn't expect that.

Cliff hangers: Patrick Stuart played a hostile and insensitive Claudius and the ghost while Penny Downie played Gertrude. Patrick Stuart was also in Macbeth so I'm guessing Patrick really likes Shakespeare to be in it multiple times. The production broke off with an intense cliff - hanger that had the audience on the edge of their seat. Hamlet had his knife in the air and was ready to attack Claudius. This cliff - hanger is very thrilling as the audience doesn't know if Claudius is dead or not and they badly want to find out. With their discovery of the mystery of is Claudius alive or dead, this could possibly lead them to read Shakespeare's work in books or newspapers.

A surveillance society: The production was filmed and made into a film in 2009 and was sent to broadcast on the BBC channel. The theme of observation continues as the action was monitored by a CCTV monitor and the Hamlet production was filmed by using a super 8 camera.

To be or not to be - closer analyses

In this extract, the metaphor "Sea of troubles" gives a powerful and depressing meaning. The meaning that is so powerful and depressing is that he is surrounded by trouble everywhere he goes as when you are at a beach, the sea is all around you so it could also imply that he can't escape it but he wants to. The keyword "Sea" implies that the longer the days go on, the deeper the troubles are. This would make the audience feel slightly sympathetic as he just wants to escape the troubles and live mortality in peace but it's just caving in.

As we go deeper into the context, I can identify a patterns of the choice of imagery and how the pattern changes. "To be or not to be" suggests that prince Hamlet is questioning himself and his mind whether to end it all (Suicide) or face his troubles. In my mind, I can visualise prince Hamlet wandering around the kingdom and challenging his mind if he wants to live in misery or peace. This would make the jacobean audience feel annoyed as they might think that he is taking the easy way out by killing himself instead of being a real king and facing them dead on. This pattern of imagery changes when prince Hamlet goes on a tangent about the mystery of the life cycle. "For in that sleep of death, what dreams may come." This quotation shows that prince Hamlet is questioning life and it's natural changes. Also, he is wandering what happens after death so

maybe he is possibly wanting to find out so he can join. The pattern of imagery changes again when later in the speech when he is talking about how he wants to join death, he is on the other hand terrified of it which is understandable. "Thus conscience does make cowards of us all" This suggests that fearing a natural thing like death makes us weak as we can't stop it from happening.