

Lecture 1

Drama

Themes of hamlet

The Impossibility of Certainty

is that the action we expect to see, particularly from Hamlet himself, is continually postponed while Hamlet tries to obtain more certain knowledge about what he is doing. This play poses many questions that other plays would simply take for granted.

know the state of Hamlet's mind by observing his behavior and listening to his speech? Can we know whether our actions will have the consequences we want them to have? Can we know anything about the afterlife? Many people have seen *Hamlet* as a play about indecisiveness, and thus about Hamlet's failure to act appropriately. It might be more interesting to consider that the play shows us how many uncertainties our lives are built upon

The Complexity of Action

The other characters obviously think much less about "action" in the abstract than Hamlet does, and are therefore less troubled about the possibility of acting effectively. They simply act as they feel is appropriate. But in some sense they prove that Hamlet is right, because all of their actions miscarry. Claudius possesses himself of queen and crown through bold action, but his conscience torments him,

The Mystery of Death

the course of the play he considers death from a great many perspectives. He ponders both the spiritual aftermath of death, embodied in the ghost, and the physical remainders of the dead, such as by Yorick's skull and the decaying corpses in the cemetery. Throughout, the idea of death is closely tied to the themes of spirituality, truth, and uncertainty in that death may bring the answers to Hamlet's deepest questions, ending once and for all the problem of trying to determine truth in an ambiguous world.

The Nation as a Diseased Body

The play's early scenes explore the sense of anxiety and dread that surrounds the transfer of power from one ruler to the next. Throughout the play, characters draw explicit connections between the moral legitimacy of a ruler and the health of the nation. Denmark is frequently described as a physical body made ill by the moral corruption of Claudius and Gertrude, and many observers interpret the presence of the ghost as a supernatural omen indicating that "[s]omething is rotten in the state of

Denmark" (I.iv.67). The dead King Hamlet is portrayed as a strong, forthright ruler under whose guard the state was in good health

Performance

Hamlet draws a distinction between outward behavior actions that a man might play and real feelings: "that within which passeth show" However, the more time we spend with Hamlet, the harder it becomes to tell what he is really feeling and what he is performing. He announces in Act One, scene five that he is going to pretend to be mad ("put an antic disposition on".) In Act Two, scene one, Ophelia describes Hamlet's mad behavior as a comical performance.

Madness

Hamlet's erratic behavior and nonsensical speech can be interpreted as a ruse to get the other characters to believe he's gone mad. On the other hand, his behavior may be a logical response to the "mad" situation he finds himself in – his father has been murdered by his uncle, who is now his stepfather. Initially,

Doubt the main character's doubt creates a world where very little is known for sure. Hamlet thinks, but isn't entirely sure, that his uncle killed his father. He believes he sees his father's Ghost, but he isn't sure he should believe in the Ghost or listen to what the Ghost tells him: "I'll have grounds / More relative than this." In his "to be or not to be" soliloquy, Hamlet suspects he should probably just kill himself, but doubt about what lies beyond the grave prevents him from acting. Hamlet is so wracked with doubt



Lecture2

Characters of hamlet play

Hamlet

The Prince of Denmark, the title character, and the protagonist. About thirty years old at the start of the play, Hamlet is the son of Queen Gertrude and the late King Hamlet, and the nephew of the present king, Claudius. Hamlet is melancholy,

Claudius

The King of Denmark, Hamlet's uncle, and the play's antagonist. The villain of the play, Claudius is a calculating, ambitious politician, driven by his sexual appetites and his lust for power,

Gertrude

The Queen of Denmark, Hamlet's mother, recently married to Claudius. Gertrude loves Hamlet deeply, but she is a shallow, weak woman who seeks affection and status more urgently than moral rectitude or truth.

Polonius

The Lord Chamberlain of Claudius's court, a pompous, conniving old man. Polonius is the father of Laertes and Ophelia.

Ophelia

Polonius's daughter, a beautiful young woman with whom Hamlet has been in love. Ophelia is a sweet and innocent young girl, who obeys her father and her brother, Laertes

Laertes

Polonius's son and Ophelia's brother, a young man who spends much of the play in France. Passionate and quick to action, Laertes is clearly a foil for the reflective Hamlet.

The Ghost

The specter of Hamlet's recently deceased father. The Ghost, who claims to have been murdered by Claudius, calls upon Hamlet to avenge him. However, it is not entirely certain whether the Ghost is what it appears to be, or whether it is something else.

Horatio

Hamlet's close friend, who studied with the prince at the university in Wittenberg. Horatio is loyal and helpful to Hamlet throughout the play.

Fortinbras

The young Prince of Norway, whose father the king (also named Fortinbras) was killed by Hamlet's father (also named Hamlet). Now Fortinbras wishes to attack Denmark to avenge his father's honor, making him another foil for Prince Hamlet.

Osric

The foolish courtier who summons Hamlet to his duel with Laertes.

Voltimand and Cornelius

Courtiers whom Claudius sends to Norway to persuade the king to prevent Fortinbras from attacking.

Marcellus and Bernardo

The officers who first see the ghost walking the ramparts of Elsinore and who summon Horatio to witness it.

Francisco

A soldier and guardsman at Elsinore.

Lecture 3

honor, religion, and the role of women in the hamlet play

Through the character Hamlet, Shakespeare forges a paradox between honor and revenge. Hamlet seeks revenge on his uncle for the sake of honor, yet refrains from murdering his uncle in fear of violating his religious values. Through Hamlet's lover Ophelia, Shakespeare speaks volumes of the status of women in society and the social prejudices exerted on them during the seventeenth century

Hamlet promises to avenge his uncle. The death of Claudius would bring the late King Hamlet honor, yet the opportunity for revenge presents itself when Hamlet sees Claudius alone. Hamlet draws out his sword, yet his fear of staining his honor intrudes his mind. Claudius is praying, and therefore if Hamlet kills him then, "he goes to heaven." It would be unethical to "do this same villain sent to heaven". This would be "hired and salary, not revenge", as Claudius "took my father grossly, full of bread", with all his sins in blossom and no time for repentance. Realizing the prospect of Claudius going to heaven

It also speaks about the role of women in a patriarchal society. Ultimately, what distinguishes Hamlet is the complexity of its characters and the paradoxes that exist within each. Hamlet desires honor, and yet is refrained from murdering fear of violating his religious values. Ophelia presents the image of a perfect; however, she is the victim of a patriarchal society and is driven to insanity by male oppression.

Cultural Identity in Shakespeare's Hamlet

Hamlet is isolated from his society due to his turbulent emotions which result from his indecision on how to respond to his father's murder. Hamlet's duty as a son is to avenge his father's death and he would be supported in his actions by society if the murderer was believed to be guilty. Hamlet's duty as a citizen and a Prince is to protect the King and to ensure stability in the monarchy. In order for Hamlet to revenge his father he would have to kill the King which creates a conflict between his two primary duties. Because of this, Hamlet finds it difficult to decide how to proceed and which duty takes precedence, and Hamlet decides to gather evidence as proof of Claudius' guilt so that his revenge is justified to society and to himself. The 'unholiest' of murdering a king who is also a close relative is highlighted by Claudius and this allows the audience to better understand the conflict and the indecision facing Hamlet.