

Analysis

Characterisation of Hamlet

Act 1 scene 2 The Melancholic Introduction.

Think about the creation of the character. **Clothing. Demeanor.** Shakespeare has a tragic hero with skill in language. Does he always use this to show his intelligence or does it sometimes show his instability? Think about his **dialogue** with Gertrude and Claudius at the start.

Soliloquy 1. – Frustration. Suicidal Contemplates suicide

Frustration at being unable to come to terms with Gertrude's marriage to Claudius so soon after the death of his father. Horror of incest – (*'incestuous sheets'* – hissing alliteration showing anger and horror).

Unrealistic idolization of his father? *Hyperion* + hyperbolic praise.

Dialogue with Horatio – Friendly, joking, affectionate – eager to see Ghost.

Tempo changes – lots of questions and energy.

Act 1 Scene 4

Dialogue with Horatio. Hamlet's feelings towards the upper class in Elsinore. **Critical of drunkenness.**

Act 1 Scene 5 The revelation given by the ghost (**exposition**) and **Hamlet swearing revenge.** Think about the pressure placed on Hamlet by the ghost. How does Shakespeare show this? **Exclamations. Sentences swift like his thoughts.** Look at the scene.

Hamlet's decision to put on an '**antic disposition**'.

Hamlet's loss of control. How does language support this? **Shouting at the ghost, swearing three times etc.** (NB Horatio – *'wild and whirling words'*)

Act 2 Scene 1 lines 78- end His actions to Ophelia causing Polonius to make assumptions about the reasons for his demeanour.

Act 2 scene 2 lines 310-331 His comments on human nature when talking to R and G '*Man delights not me*'

Soliloquy 3 '*O what a rogue and peasant slave am I*' – **Self-loathing.** '*The spirit that I have seen/ May be the very devil.*' **Doubting.** '*The Play's the thing/ wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.*' **Planning.**

Hamlet begins to question and think too much about aspects of his life.

Act 3 Scene 1

Soliloquy 4 – '*To be or not to be*' **Suicidal thoughts Depression Despair?**

Dialogue with Ophelia ('get thee to a nunnery') – Loses control when he is spurned by his love. **Mysoginistic** because of his problems with his mother's behaviour? Behaviour at the play (**Act 3 Scene 2**) **Dialogue – dangerous, hateful, overwrought).**

Act 3 Scene 3 soliloquy 6 *'Now might I do it pat, now a' is a praying.'*

Procrastination when Claudius is praying – refers back to OH's description of his suffering in purgatory – he wants the same for Claudius. (**Dramatic Irony**, as C is unable to manage prayer after all.)

Act 3 Scene 4 Directly after this – rage at Gertrude (mocking parallel sentences threatening *'daggers'*) and then rash murder of Polonius
This action takes him even further away from reaching his objective. Dramatic technique – introduce self inflicted obstacle. (own goal)

His treatment of Polonius' body (*'I'll lug the guts into the neighbour room'*) and dialogue with Claudius. (c: *Where's Polonius? H: At supper. C: At supper? Where? H: Not where he eats but where he is eaten.*) Calls Claudius *'Mother'*

His alienation of those around him. Shakespeare introducing another aspect of revenge – this time directed at Hamlet. **Banished to England.**

Act 3 Scene 4

Soliloquy 7 – *'How all occasions do inform against me.'* **comparison** with Fortinbras and vowing to take revenge *'My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth.'*

Hamlet is then left out of the following scene to introduce the passage of time and set up the other characters.

Act 5 Scene 1

This short act marks a **move to action** and fits **classic tragic structure**.

Lack of soliloquies. No more introspection.

Hamlet's feelings are shown through **dialogue** with gravediggers and Horatio

The gravediggers (clowns) are common and an indication of this is made through the writing.

Common everyday speech– linked with prose

Insightful, intelligent– linked with poetry

The First Clown in particular takes every word literally, forcing Hamlet to say exactly what he means and particularly with the word 'act'.

"If I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act; and an act hath three branches: it is to act, to do, and to perform" (5.1.10-11).

This raises the question of why Hamlet fails to act before this scene. After all, he has acted, he knows what he needs to do, but he is unable to perform the final action needed to kill Claudius.

Hamlet begins to question life and death showing his feelings in conversation rather than soliloquy.

The language shows that Hamlet is coming to terms with the inevitability of death and how it strips everyone down to the same level. *'Imperious Caesar, dead and turned to clay/ Might stop a hole to keep the wind away.'*

When Hamlet interrupts the funeral his announcement clearly shows that he has returned to Elsinore with purpose and takes on his father's name:

"This is I, Hamlet the Dane" (5.1.241-242).

Hamlet's love for Ophelia. Strength of the language.

The leaping into the grave foreshadows the death of both Hamlet and Laertes.

Act 5 Scene 2

The scene begins with an explanation of how Hamlet escaped from the plot to kill him.

We also have an indication that he has **taken on the role of king** by using his ring to seal the letters.

We have a calmer Hamlet.

Hamlet's language moves from telling us what he will do to telling us what he did do.

Active verbs.

"In the dark, / Groped I to find out them, had my desire, / Fingering their packet, and in fine withdrew / To mine own room again, making so bold, / My fears forgetting manners, to unseal / Their grand commission" (5.2.14-19)

The **dialogue** between Hamlet and Horatio is important.

Hamlet is talking to someone about Claudius' actions.

Horatio's **reactions** show that he is horrified thus adding support to the alienated Hamlet.

Hamlet assures Horatio that he will take action. Horatio shows concern that Hamlet may lose the duel.

Shakespeare here shows the definite change in Hamlet's outlook. One cannot avoid one's destiny.

Connections to 'to be or not to be'. He now says

"The readiness is all".

This section is lengthy with slow pace in contrast to the following fight.

Stage directions call for a great flourish of trumpets indicating the grand scene.

Look at how Hamlet talks to Laertes. Asks for forgiveness but still maintains that he was mad.

The pace of the following duel is quick and full of action.

The tense duel with the **dramatic irony** of the plot to kill Hamlet injected at certain points.

Gertrude's actions towards Hamlet and subsequent death.

We see Leartes reluctant to go through with the act but Hamlet's accusations cause him to fight on eventually striking Hamlet.

Leartes is struck by his own sword and poisoned.

The queen falls. Hamlet orders the doors locked. Leartes confesses. Hamlet stabs the king but also forces him to drink the poison.

Hamlet begins to die but ties up as many loose ends as possible. We are still in religious territory here and Hamlet is dying a murderer. The audience must sympathise with him and the last words are important.

Shakespeare actually has Hamlet speak directly to us not just Horatio:

"You that look pale and tremble at this chance, / That are but mutes or audience to this act...Report me and my cause aright / To the unsatisfied" (5.2.276-277,281-282).

Horatio's actions and speech, along with Fortinbras' recognition of Hamlet as a hero, satisfy the audience that a great tragedy has occurred.

Hamlet fulfils all the criteria of a tragic hero by the time Fortinbras arrives.

In the final scene he is a man of action who is killed by circumstances rather than any direct fault of his own. The debate over whether Hamlet is a hero depends heavily on how much weight is placed on the final act versus the play as a whole. It is difficult to call Hamlet a hero based on his actions during the beginning and middle of the play, where his madness seems to be a form of escape from action rather than a way to defeat Claudius.

TASK:

Choose a play in which a central character is heroic yet vulnerable. Show how the dramatist makes you aware of both qualities and discuss how they affect your response to the character's fate in the play as a whole.

Introduction - Use words from the task and remember that you will answer not only about **how S makes us aware of H's heroism and vulnerability** but also how they **affect your response to the character's fate** (what happens to him) in the play as a whole. Consider techniques. Tragic structure? Hamlet as tragic hero. Use of dialogue and soliloquy?

- **Point (topic sentence) - hamlet as tragic hero (See document)**
- **Evidence - how does he fit the criteria? You may wish to discuss tragic structure as well.**
- **Effect - What is the effect of this on the audience?**

You may take the red point and the blue point together.

- **Point - what is heroic about him really? Look at the external conflicts he battles (theme of corruption - moral, political and social? Surveillance? Threat of war?) Look at the burdens he has to carry and 'set right'. Look at his end (the last scene) - What does he achieve? What is said about him? How has S shown him to be heroic?**
- **Evidence**
- **Effect. How does this affect your response to his fate?**

- **Points - how does S show that is he vulnerable? Consider his internal conflicts, which he, and we, explore through the soliloquies.**

- (depression, suicide/sin, idealism/reality, self-doubt, abandonment by G and O) madness - acted or actually unbalanced?
- Evidence
 - Effect - how do these vulnerabilities make us respond to him? What about how they affect his fate?
 - 1) he is ready to believe the worst of Claudius and wants to punish him even **before** he meets the ghost **therefore** the ghost's revelation affects him strongly but he loves his mother so will not expose her.
 - 2) His habit of deep consideration and philosophizing mean that he **strives to be decent, though he wants** revenge - he cannot find an answer that will cover both elements.
 - 3) He cannot escape through suicide because of God's law.
 - 4) His love of G and his horror about her marriage to C make him unbalanced mentally especially when he has proof of C's guilt: this leads to him killing Polonius (dramatic technique) self-inflicted obstacle. **In these ways his character affects his fate.**
- He is both more active and more resigned during the falling action of the play in comparison with the Hamlet we know from before the turning point.

Conclusion - refer back to the task and the introduction. Sum up the argument you made (without tedious repetition). End strongly.