

Worksheet 6 – Memory, Proof and Mirror Images

Review

Answer these questions about the previous video lecture to check how much you remember.

1. John McRae argues that Hamlet is not a Christian play but a _____ one?
 - a) Spiritual
 - b) Heathen
 - c) Communist
 - d) Humanist

2. In Tragedies, what does John McRae say is overthrown?
 - a) The Monarchy
 - b) The Harmony of the Spheres
 - c) The Rule of Law
 - d) The Garden of Earthly Delight

3. What does John McRae argue that is Hamlet's biggest confusion in the first soliloquy?
 - a) The time period since his father has died
 - b) The studies he has learned in Wittenberg
 - c) The love he has for Ophelia
 - d) His feelings towards Denmark

Recall

Answer these questions after watching the video lecture to check how much you remember.

4. What is the name of the picture that John McRae uses to show the three parts of the human psyche?
 - a) Allegory of Man
 - b) Allegory of Prudence
 - c) Wishes of Prudence
 - d) Desires of Providence

5. The image of being 'proved' that Fortinbras uses in Act 5 scene 2 L379 – 84 comes from which area of life?
 - a) Science
 - b) Cookery
 - c) Metalwork
 - d) Glasswork

6. In the second soliloquy, Act 1 Scene 5 L92 – 11, Hamlet dedicates himself to which concept?
 - a) Kingship
 - b) Action
 - c) Love
 - d) Memory

Analysis :

7. Let's look again at the full text of Hamlet's second soliloquy (Act scene 5 L92-112 that John McRae examines (2.00) and the full second meditation.(Act 2 scene 2 L259 – 276) (5.30) Both of these are important in terms of his direction in life and the paths that he needs to tread after listening to the ghost.

Second soliloquy:

*O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else?
And shall I couple hell? O, fie! — Hold, my heart;
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
But bear me stiffly up. — Remember thee!
Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe. Remember thee!
Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
That youth and observation copied there;
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmix'd with baser matter: yes, by heaven! —
O most pernicious woman!
O villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!
My tables, — meet it is I set it down,
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain;
At least, I am sure, it may be so in Denmark*

- a) Go through your text and underline all the references to memory or recording. Whilst this soliloquy is often overlooked as being merely plot driven, John McRae outlines how, through it, he is dedicating himself to the memory of his father. There is a list of ways of recording information and yet ironically, Hamlet insists on recording the nature of a villain. Note down the contrast between what Hamlet says he will leave and turn away from and what he will take up instead. How does this contrast with what he actually does?
- b) Re-read the first soliloquy and make sure you have notes on the confusion that Hamlet about time and the correct amount of time given to grieve his father. This is a crucial element not only for Hamlet but is also seen in Laertes grief upon his return to Denmark after his father is murdered. Laertes discusses his fathers' *'obscure funeral— No trophy, sword, nor hatchment o'er his bones, No noble rite nor formal ostentation'* need an answer from a diligent and loving son as does the unseemly speedy re-marriage of Gertrude where a *'beast that wants discourse of reason would have mourned longer.'*
- c) Look at the imagery that both soliloquys use and create a mind map that shows how Hamlet's character develops over his seven stages or soliloquies. What sides of Hamlet are seen in both these soliloquies and where do you see some ideas or phrases changing and developing?

Extension: Re-read Hamlet's first and second meditations and use the information and imagery in those to add to your mind map.

1st meditation: Act 1 scene 4: L7-38

2nd meditation: Act 2 scene 2 L259-276

Evaluation

8. From 4.00 John McRae discusses the need for Hamlet to examine, consider and evaluate everything in his life. The news from the ghost of his father has upset the nature of his world to such an extent that he needs to look at everything and see if it, in fact, what he thought it was.

One of the areas of his life that needs to undergo such evaluation is that of his friendships and many critics have looked at the comparison between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with Horatio.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are sent for by Claudius and Gertrude and the way they are interpreted is very changeable in delivery and performance.

However, Claudius does admit that 'the need we have to use you did provoke our hasty sending' (2.2.4) which introduces the audience to their deception. They are offered 'such thanks as fits a king's remembrance' by Gertrude (2.2.25) although this is not always suggested to be a financial reward. They do however, give their 'service freely at your feet to be commanded.' (2.2.31) which could show their allegiance.

In the 2021 Production at the Young Vic, Greg Hersov showed real affection between Hamlet and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern including selfie taking and childish handshakes.

- a) Look at the images below of different productions and make notes on how the proxemics and body language display different elements of this friendship.
- b) Then look compare these with the images of Hamlet and Horatio and see if you can draw conclusions based on productions.



Hersov 2021

Rosencrantz and
Guildenstern



Hersov 2021

Horatio and Hamlet



Gregory Doran
2008

Rosencrantz and
Guildenstern



Gregory Doran 2008

Hamlet and Horatio



Kenneth
Branagh 1996

Rosencrantz
and
Guildenstern



Kenneth Branagh
1996

Hamlet and Horatio

c) When you have made your conclusions, go back to your text and see where the evidence, used by each director has come from.

- d) Think about the key scenes that both groups of friends have with Hamlet and make notes in your margin to see if the words that we are given by Shakespeare can be seen in more than one way. High marks are given to students who explore ambiguity and this is where performances can be as powerful as critics for forming our more nuanced ideas of characters.
- e) Read this blog and continue your investigation on the differing friendships that we see.
<http://hyperion2satyr.blogspot.com/2011/04/iiii-rosencrantz-guildenstern-tennant.html>

Extension:

If you have access, read Dr Katy Limmer's article on male friendship in EMagplus74 December 2017 where she explores the historical nature of perfect friendship and why Rosencrantz and Guildenstern could not fulfill the role that Horatio has.

Glossary

Psyche - the human soul, mind, or spirit.

Remembrance - the action of remembering something; a memory or recollection; a thing kept or given as a reminder or in commemoration of someone.

Examined - inspect (someone or something) thoroughly in order to determine their nature or condition; test the knowledge or proficiency of (someone) by requiring them to answer questions or perform tasks.

Considered - having been thought about carefully.

Evaluated - form an idea of the amount, number, or value of; assess.

Conditioned - have a significant influence on or determine (the manner or outcome of something)

Found wanting - lacking all that is needed or expected.

Quest - a long or arduous search for something.