

Worksheet 10 – Hamlet – The Actor

Review

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

1. How does John McRae encourage us to feel about Polonius?
 - a) That he is a wise counsellor
 - b) That he is a comic and irritating character
 - c) That he is a skilled diplomat
 - d) That he is a continually manipulative father

2. Why does McRae believe that music is an important image that Ophelia uses in her soliloquy?
 - a) Because music is the food of love
 - b) Because music shows some divine intervention
 - c) Because Hamlet and Ophelia have harmony as lovers
 - d) Because music was a stabilizing force in life

3. What does John McRae say is the contrast between Ophelia and Hamlet at this point in the play?
 - a) Their wider family relationships – Ophelia has a brother and Hamlet is alone.
 - b) Their relationships with their fathers – both are controlled by their fathers but Hamlet is asked to do something whereas Ophelia is asked not to do something.
 - c) Their understanding of the world and their place in it.
 - d) Their mental pathways – Ophelia is moving downwards whilst Hamlet is going up.

Recall

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

4. How does Hamlet's coaching and instruction of the players move the play and the action forward?
 - a) He makes them better actors
 - b) He helps them install mirrors so that the King's face is reflected.
 - c) He moves them from medieval acting practices into the Modern Renaissance
 - d) He expresses all the frustrations that Shakespeare has with his own acting troop.

5. What prop or image does Hamlet use to test his friendship with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern?
 - a) Nature
 - b) Music – a lute
 - c) Decay
 - d) Music – a pipe or recorder

6. What does John McRae say that Horatio lacks?
 - a) Determination
 - b) Imagination
 - c) Courage
 - d) Loyalty

Analysis :

7. Let's look again at what John McRae says about Hamlet testing his friendships.

- a) Re-watch from 7.00 – 10.15 and note down the differences between the way that Hamlet talks to Horatio and how he tests Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
- b) Now re-read the 4th meditation Act 3 scene 2 L52 – 83. What does Hamlet say about the qualities of friendship and how does he keep this slightly objective and academic?
- c) Now re-read the interaction between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and Hamlet later in the scene. L289 – 363.

It's important to remember that whilst Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have been asked to find out what is the matter with him when they first approach him, they have not been asked to challenge his behavior or speak for the King directly here. This is therefore proof that they are acting on the side of the King rather than sympathetically for Hamlet.

MASSOLIT – SHAKESPEARE:HAMLET (JOHN McRAE)

- d) John McRae talks about Hamlet using music and the instrument of the pipe as a metaphor for how he feels about his friendship with them. Take this image and examine it in some detail. Where is the evidence that they are ‘playing’ him?
- e) Look at the following table and consider what the role of this play within a play has within the play. Rate them and remember to prove what you say.

Rating	Possible function	Reason for rating
	Plot function: A trap	
	Character function: For Hamlet it confirms Claudius’ guilt and the truth of the ghost	
	Dramatic function: It heightens the tension	
	Dramatic and structural function: In the very centre of the play, it creates a pause in the dramatic momentum and sets the action off again.	
	Dramatic function: Increases the dramatic irony as the off-stage audience watches Hamlet watching the onstage audience, anticipating what is going to happen.	
	Structural function: Through the dumb show’s silent telling of the murder, it echoes the story the ghost told.	
	Thematic function: Highlights key themes – corruption, betrayal, the poisoning of the body.	
	Linguistic and stylistic function: The archaic language and dramatic verse of the play within a play acts as a foil for the language of Shakespeare’s play.	
	Generic function: It references revenge tragedies, a genre popular in the late 15 th century, which often featured a dumb show of the murder.	
	Generic and linguistic function: It prompts Hamlet’s ‘revenger’s’ soliloquy – ‘Tis now the very witching time of night.’	
	Character function: It alters the ways we feel about Hamlet and his determination.	

Extension:

Go back to the other mentions and references to music in this play and think about the contrast between harmony and disharmony and why Shakespeare is using this image?

Do some further research into Elizabethan musical instruments and think about what this said about the wider world. We did this with the image of the garden so try to make links between the image of music and the society of the time.

Here is a review of traditional music being used at Shakespeare's Globe and why this is slightly controversial. Read through and note down how the music might be used in a different way to today.
<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/jun/09/shakespeares-globe-music>

The Britannica encyclopedia also has some interesting information about music within Shakespeare's plays as a start:

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Music-in-Shakespeares-Plays-1369568/Instrumental-music>

There are a lot of recordings of Elizabethan music on YouTube for you to listen to which will create a good atmosphere and idea of what Hamlet is discussing when he talks of harmony and disharmony.

Evaluation

8. Throughout the play and particularly covered in this lecture is the idea of 'playing.' Obviously, in this Scene, we see an example of actors playing out a play and the actors we are used to watching being slightly passive as an audience. It's a moment of meta-theatre and helps to bond the audience with the actors as for that time only, we are in a similar situation.

Playing and pretence are huge themes within the play and it is worthwhile looking at linking the different types of pretence that we have.

- a) Spend some time looking at the following categories and then find places in the play where this kind of 'playing' or 'acting' takes place.
- b) See if you can make links or draw conclusions about whether these roles are taken mostly by one character or in one part of the play. This will help you to deepen your analysis of character and be able to look at the progression of ideas and themes over time.
 - 'Playing' in order to hide truth
 - 'Playing' in order to find out truth
 - 'Playing' as a job
 - 'Playing' as a forced occupation
 - 'Playing' in order to create intimacy.

Extension:

You may have been lucky enough to attend a performance at Shakespeare's Globe but in case you haven't, use the links below to discover the space virtually and to find out a bit more about the norms that the audience would expect. Our study of Hamlet needs to be considered as a play rather than as written text so it is crucial that you consider the performance aspects which we have already looked at a little in a previous worksheet.

<https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/discover/about-us/virtual-tour/>

<http://shakespeare-online.com/essays/shakespeareaudience.html>

This article below is also really useful in terms of examining the 'play within a play's role so spend a little time reading and making notes on what is argued.

<https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/hamlet-the-play-within-the-play>

Glossary

Transform - make a marked change in the form, nature, or appearance of.

Medieval - resembling or likened to the Middle Ages, especially in being cruel, uncivilized, or primitive

Overdone - done to excess; exaggerated

Virtue - behaviour showing high moral standards; (in traditional Christian angelology) the seventh-highest order of the ninefold celestial hierarchy.

Corruption - dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power, typically involving bribery; the process by which a word or expression is changed from its original state to one regarded as erroneous or debased.

Dumb Show - gestures used to convey a meaning or message without speech; mime; a piece of dramatic mime; (especially in English drama of the 16th and 17th centuries) a part of a play acted in mime to summarize, supplement, or comment on the main action.

Pressure - the use of persuasion or intimidation to make someone do something; continuous physical force exerted on or against an object by something in contact with it.

Dodgy - dishonest or unreliable.

Liberate - set (someone) free from imprisonment, slavery, or oppression

Responsible - having an obligation to do something, or having control over or care for someone, as part of one's job or role; being the primary cause of something and so able to be blamed or credited for it.